

Itachi's true story: Book of Dark Night

Chapter 4 – The phoenix of the blue sky doesn't forget to flutter about with injured wings

1

Tomorrow, Kohinata Mukai would take a day off again after a month. Uchiha Itachi, who came to know this fact from Shimura Danzō's mouth, strengthened his resolution of carrying out the plan.

The arrangements had already been set, and Itachi's and Uchiha Shisui's mission schedule, who would travel together with him, had already been changed.

All thanks to Danzō's management.

Tomorrow, Itachi would kill a shinobi that lived in his own village...

Although he was a traitor, it didn't change the fact that they were compatriots. Comrades of the village. He'd be lying if he said that he wasn't hesitating in killing that man.

However, that was the most important mission Itachi had been experiencing so far in his shinobi life.

He couldn't turn it down.

He was strongly bearing in his mind the fact that Mukai communicated as a traitor with the Village of the Hidden Mist, and that he was a spy who kept revealing the Village of the Hidden Leaf's important highly classified information, and somehow he was coming to terms with his feeling of guilt.

«Everything is ready!» a cheerful voice broke Itachi's train of thoughts.

«As you told me, I've set eight of them.» his younger brother said, smiling, and he returned the smile.

They were in a wood.

Accepting his determination of tomorrow's mission, Itachi was getting some rest. Being begged by Sasuke, he was keeping him company in his training. Among some trees that were standing close together, some targets that had a double circle painted on them had been hidden by Sasuke. None of them could be seen perfectly from where Itachi was.

«Aah, big brother.»

With an expression that couldn't conceal his excitement, Sasuke urged him with a bouncing voice.

Nodding, Itachi clutched the kunai in both his hands.

He was holding one of them in each space between his fingers, and they were exactly eight. Eight iron claws flew from his fists, which were clutched lightly.

He hung his head, and prepared himself mentally just a little. Then he pumped inside his eyes the chakra he had amassed in his stomach.

Sharingan...

The breath of every tree became suddenly noisy. Among the thunderous pulsation of the life that crawled inside them, the foreign presence of the small circles became visible.

Eight.

Itachi took a short breath, and lightly kicked the ground.

He made his head and feet swap places in midair. Because turning his body upside-down his centre of balance would lower, spreading, and his posture would be more stable. By stabilizing his posture, his precision of control of the kunai would increase.

Closing his eyes, he visualised the eight targets in his mind. He couldn't reach at least two of them from his position. The target that had been casually left behind the huge rock in front of him was the most bothersome.

First of all he threw the four kunai in his left hand.

He accurately pierced four targets that were in a relatively easy place.

Then, the two kunai that he was holding secured from the thumb to the middle finger of his right hand.

They easily pierced their targets as well.

Two left.

Itachi's body was still in midair. Not even one second had passed since he had jumped up.

He transferred the one held between his middle finger and his ring finger in his left hand.

He had one kunai per hand.

He threw them swinging both his arms at the same time.

He dared to overlap the trajectory of the two kunai. The blades, that clashed in midair, made a sharp metallic sound, and flew in a different direction as if they had repelled each other.

He landed.

The Sharingan emitted a crimson glint.

In front of Itachi's gaze, who had slowly got up, there was his younger brother's figure.

Sasuke, who had concealed himself behind a tree to avoid the danger, suddenly showed his face. Apparently he was amazed by Itachi's skill, who had pierced the centre of every target. Open mouthed, he was staring at the back of the rock that was in front of his eyes. The most bothersome target was there.

Of course he had hit that as well. Making the last two clash, he had changed their trajectory for that target.

«Great big brother! Right in the centre, even in the target in your blind spot behind the rock!!»

Sasuke jumped out from behind a tree. He was holding a kunai in both his hands. Seeing his older brother's skill, he got psyched up, and it looked like he couldn't contain himself.

«Aaaall right, me too!»

«...Sasuke, let's go back home.»

«!»

Sasuke, who was eager and agitated, became suddenly still. Displeasure filled the younger brother's face, who was going towards his older brother.

«...»

He glared at his older brother in disapproval.

«You said you'd teach me a new shuriken technique!»

He had made a promise. However, he thought he had fully realised his promise with the thing that he had displayed now in front of his eyes.

«There's a rather important mission tomorrow, and this is in preparation for that.»

He had mainly prepared his mind.

His younger brother turned his face away, and made a sour grimace. His clear eyes, below his frowning eyebrows, were strained to the point that it looked like he was about to cry anytime soon.

«...big brother, you're a liar.»

He wasn't angry because he hadn't been taught the shuriken technique. He was angry because the time he was spending with his older brother had been interrupted.

If Itachi had been able to, he'd have wanted to train with his younger brother at his heart's content. But tomorrow's mission wasn't so easy to allow that.

Also Itachi wanted to cry...

Even if he had turned his face away, he beckoned his younger brother, who was peeking at his older brother with reproachful eyes.

«!»

His brother's face, which had clouded, suddenly cleared up with joy. Making the happy sound of his footstep resound through the wood, Sasuke rushed towards him.

«Forgive me Sasuke... next time.»

As he said so, he pushed out his index finger, and hit Sasuke's forehead, who was running.

«Ouch!» Sasuke, who had stopped his charge, yelled a little closing his eyes.

As he looked up towards his older brother, his mouth turned down at the corners. When he made this expression, Sasuke was always planning something.

«Big brother, look!»

Sasuke, who had crossed both his hands and had prepared to use the kunai, smiled boldly.

«Tooo—!»

Before Itachi could even have the time to stop him, Sasuke jumped towards the targets.

«Hey! If you act recklessly...» Itachi yelled, and in front of his eyes Sasuke twisted his ankle thrusting it deeply into the ground headfirst.

On their way back home.

He was carrying Sasuke, who had injured his foot, on his back, and they were walking through the Village of the Hidden Leaf towards the Uchiha district. Feeling his younger brother's warmth on his back, the time passed quietly.

Sasuke's presence on his back was causing little ripples. Itachi halted, and looked at his younger brother over his shoulder.

«What's the matter?»

«Here... it's the place where Dad works.»

«It's the headquarter of the Konoha Military Police Force.»

As he looked up towards the huge building in concrete with a circular plant, Itachi answered simply his younger brother's question.

At his older brother's words, the younger brother continued with a mature voice.

«I've already wondered before, but why the Uchiha clan's crest is in the Konoha Military Police Force symbol?»

«What... you noticed...»

«Of course!»

At Sasuke's voice, who had answered stretching himself, he had smiled spontaneously.

«Yeah... To put it simple, they say that the ancestors of the Uchiha clan were the ones who organised and founded this Military Police Force. That's why they added our clan's crest to this organization's symbol. Since old times the Uchiha clan has always been protecting and maintaining the village's public order. The Uchiha crest is the evidence of our proud clan.» Itachi said while avoiding difficult words to the best of his ability, satisfying his younger brother's desire to try to know something.

His younger brother listened silently to his older brother's words.

«Right now also the Uchiha clan has become smaller, but even now almost everyone is a member of a team here, and contributes to the maintenance of the public order of the village.»

Shisui was an exception. He had heard that in Shisui's case there had been a request from the shinobi of the village, who had acknowledged his value. If he had joined the Military Police Force, his association with the outside shinobi would have extremely decreased, and he'd have been completely included in the Uchiha clan's frame. Because of the petition of the shinobi of the village, who feared that, Shisui was assigned to local missions. However such thing probably wasn't something he could explain to his younger brother, and Itachi omitted it in his considerations.

«Because only excellent shinobi can supervise the crimes that the other shinobi commit.»
And...

Only an even more excellent shinobi can put an end to the wars that the shinobi generate.

«Bug brother, will you enter here too?»

His younger brother's innocent question stabbed Itachi's heart.

He won't enter...

The real answer had reached his throat.

«Well... I don't know...»

He couldn't tell his younger brother that he was joining the Anbu because of the clan's dissatisfaction towards the village, no matter what. Itachi had no choice but speak ambiguously.

«Do it!» his brother, who knew nothing about the gloomy situation of the adults, yelled in a carefree voice. This sparkling purity tightened Itachi's chest.

«Because when I'll grow up... I'll join the Military Police Force too!!»

Being a member of the Military Police Force with his brother, and giving it all in his mission.

This was an everyday dream.

But such day wouldn't absolutely come...

Itachi would go to the Anbu.

Even if there had been the circumstances that he could join the Military Police Force, he'd have had no intention of contenting himself with that.

His dream was to erase all the conflicts of this world. To make this dream come true, he wouldn't tolerate the Military Police Force very much.

«Dad will come at tomorrow's entrance ceremony. It's the first step of my dream.»

His younger brother's dream was to work as a shinobi in the Military Police Force with his older brother...

He was happy.

But...

That dream wouldn't come true.

«That's right.»

Itachi could give him only a vague reply.

*

When they arrived to the gate that separated the Uchiha district and the village, suddenly there was a presence standing near the wall.

«You're late... what were you doing? There's something I have to tell you now.»

His father, with his arms crossed, was looking at Itachi.

«Let's go home quickly.»

«Yes.»

His father nodded at Itachi's answer, and began walking in front of him. Following his footsteps, which were going without hesitation straight towards home, Itachi took slow steps with his younger brother still on his back.

Since when a confrontation with his father was so troublesome?

He knew the answer. But Itachi didn't want to admit that answer.

They were in his father's room.

In front of Itachi and Sasuke, who were sitting one next to the other, there was their father's figure with his arms crossed.

«So it's tomorrow.»

His father began talking abruptly.

Itachi felt that his heartbeat increased as he kept silent. He understood the meaning of his father's words. He was referring to the fact of Mukai's assassination of tomorrow. That had increased his heartbeat.

How far did his father know about it?

And from who had he heard about the mission?

There was a vague answer to the latter question. Assuming that he had heard it from someone, it was unlikely unless it was a person close to Danzō.

Why did Danzō reveal some information about the mission to his father?

This doubt raised other doubts, and disturbed Itachi's heart.

«Fufu... as expected from my child... You've come so far in only half a year since you've been promoted to chūnin.»

Itachi looked silently at his father.

Sasuke turned his worrisome-looking gaze towards his older brother.

«Tomorrow's mission is special, but... I've decided I'll come along, too.»

His chest was resounding faster than ever that day. However, apart from that, the heartbeat of his younger brother sitting near him was way faster.

His father, having his head filled with the things of the clan, had forgot how much important day was tomorrow for his younger brother.

His anger towards his father surged.

«If this mission turns out to be a success, Itachi... your admission into the Anbu will be almost decided.»

His father's eyes, who was looking at his son that kept being sunk into silence, had turned red.

«Do you understand...»

Only one person was allowed to accompany him in Mukai's assassination. He had already informed Danzō that Shisui would accompany him. The fact that his father didn't know it meant that he didn't know the details of the mission. Perhaps he had been informed only about the schedule of the execution of the mission by someone.

Even if he hated the village, he was at the mercy of the information that was brought from the village. Such thing about his father looked unbearably pathetic.

This mission needed the resolution of being ready to die.

He wouldn't have brought anyone along except Shisui.

He wouldn't absolutely allow his father's intervention.

«You don't have to worry about such thing. Besides...»

He looked at Sasuke. Even though he probably wanted to cry out loud any time soon, his wise younger brother smiled, repressing his own feelings.

“It's okay, big brother...”

The voice of his younger brother's heart was almost audible.

Itachi smiled, and put these words in his eyes.

“Try and say it... tomorrow's an important day for you, right?”

He pushed his little back with his gaze loaded with strength.

«Dad... tomorrow there's my...»

«Tomorrow's mission is an important mission also for the Uchiha clan!»

His younger brother's courage was smashed by his father's strong words, who had nothing in his mind except the clan's business. Then, Sasuke covered his face with a frozen expression as he desperately tried to hold back his tears.

The anger towards his father had crossed the limit.

Was the clan important to that extent?

Was his younger brother indifferent to him?

The only thing reflected in his eyes was the future of the clan. He wasn't thinking at all about his son, who was about to undertake a suicidal mission. Things like that didn't fit inside those eyes, much less his younger brother. How would he outrival the Village of the Hidden Leaf with such a narrow mind?

He was fed up with everything.

«I'll quit tomorrow's mission.»

«!? What nonsense are you saying!? Even you should understand how much important tomorrow is! What the heck are you talking about!?»

His father had his breath taken away. Then, for the first time his father recalled his own son's plans for tomorrow. That gave him another unbearable fit of anger...

He was sad.

«Usually, a relative attends to the Academy entering ceremony. There was also a notification... Father.»

His words that he'd abandon the mission were serious. There was no lie in those words that came from the depths of his heart.

Apparently, his father had understood Itachi's seriousness. After a short silence streamed across the place, his father breathed a small sigh as if he was shocked.

«...I understand already... I'll go to the Academy.» his father said standing up, and walked towards the dining room where his mother was waiting for them. Also Itachi and Sasuke followed after, leaving the room.

The bamboo tube in the garden made a dry sound.

Itachi knew that if his father said it in that way, he would surely go to Sasuke's entrance ceremony. His son's admission into the Anbu was one step nearer to the achievement of the clan's dearest wishes. It was impossible that he'd waste it for Sasuke's entrance ceremony.

Since it was impossible that he'd let his father come along in his mission, no matter what, he seriously intended on going to Sasuke's entrance ceremony.

Even the fact that he was fed up with everything, even the fact that he wanted to go to the Academy wasn't a lie. But it didn't mean that he'd give up also the fact that he'd carry out his mission with Shisui.

His entrance into the Anbu wasn't the foothold of the achievement of the clan's dearest wish.

It was a modest step for the fulfilment of Itachi's dream of becoming the most excellent shinobi in this world, to erase all the conflicts.

He had no intention of surrendering.

He used his younger brother for that purpose...

He was disappointed in himself.

Sasuke, who felt the responsibility of having built the gloomy atmosphere between his older brother and his father, although his father's participation in his entrance ceremony had been decided, followed Itachi's back quietly. Itachi opened his mouth while looking at his younger brother over his shoulder, hiding his guilty feelings.

«Your left feet... cool it down properly»

Had his smiling face, as he said it smiling, become stiff?

He felt so.

«Yeah...» his younger brother answered with a complicated expression.

Itachi couldn't find the words to say to Sasuke.

2

«It wouldn't be an exaggeration sayin' that you live for this fella.» Kohinata Mukai said in front of Itachi's eyes, who gulped, and breathed out the smoke of his cigarette. A silver bottle full of sake was clutched on the hand that wasn't holding the cigarette.

More than ten Kirigakure shinobi were scattered around the three people, who were glaring at each other.

They had already lost consciousness.

Itachi and Shisui alone had defeated all of them.

«Surrender quietly, Kohinata Mukai. Hokage-sama is a generous man towards people who surrender. He probably won't kill you.» Shisui said standing next to Itachi. The three tomoe of the Sharingan had already appeared on his eyes. While looking down not to see it, Mukai made a cynic smile.

«Shisui the Body-Flicker, you've become quite famous. Even so, are you walkin' only places hit by the sunlight, that you've nothing but this kinda feelings? Or...»

Suddenly interrupting his words, Mukai drank the silver bottle.

«...does it mean that you're still a brat?»

Opening only his right eye wide, Mukai sneered at Shisui. This attitude of looking down on him formed a crease between Shisui's eyebrows.

«You know the things I did. In that case, you understand whether you'll be allowed to surrender or not.»

He made the ashes fall with a flip of his thumb.

«Two geniuses of the Uchiha at the peak of their power to assassinate me, what an utmost privilege.»

He threw the cigarette into the portable ashtray he fetched from his breast pocket. Putting the cap to the silver bottle, he put it away on the pocket of his vest.

«If this goes on, I'll be in danger» Mukai muttered, and his chakra suddenly increased its quantity.

He had restored his Shadow Clones. The same moment Mukai's chakra increased, Itachi released his own Shadow Clones that were guarding the Konoha Hospital.

«Knowin' that their old man that's been talkin' 'till now is a Shadow Clone, my kids will really got mad this time.»

While Mukai scratched his head, he glared at the two in front of him.

«Ain't this an excuse to go home quickly?»

He lowered his waist deeply, and showed the peculiar stance of the Gentle Fist, which put both his palms at chest height.

Itachi spat out a thought that was in the depths of his chest.

«Why a shinobi of your calibre turned into a spy?»

«When you become an old man there're a lot of reasons. And you won't know which reasons 'till you grow old. That's why if I told you about them now, you won't be able to understand half of it.»

«What would your sick children do if you die?»

«For various reasons like this one, I can't die in such place. Even if this means I'll have to kill ya guys.»

Countless veins ran around Mukai's left eye.

«The Byakugan!»

The moment Itachi yelled, Shisui had already put some space between them jumping back.

«I can't go easy on you, so give up.»

Mukai's voice was close to Itachi's ear, who was still standing there.

Suddenly the distance between them closed.

His right and left palms hit Itachi's throat and solar plexus at the same time with a terrific speed.

He stabbed his stomach with the side of the hand that had hit his solar plexus, and bent his index and middle finger inside his body.

«Fu!»

Mukai's sideblow, who had breathed out vigorously, pulled out Itachi's bowels.

An instant...

Itachi, who had his stomach torn up and was standing stock still, turned into innumerable crows that flew around. Without even avoiding the beaks that attacked him, Mukai pulled through them as if it were nothing with an elegant movement of his body.

Shisui drew near him from behind.

«Fire Release: Great Fireball Technique.»

A fireball was emitted from Shisui's mouth, who had quickly formed hand seals, and it gulped Mukai down.

Still in the stance with the palm of his right hand held out in front of his face, Mukai faced the fireball directly.

A direct hit.

No.

The fireball split into two equal parts in front of Mukai.

It didn't seem that he had used some technique. It didn't necessarily mean that he had clad his body in a special atmosphere. It seemed to Itachi that the fireball had split in front of Mukai's eyes by itself.

«I use the Gentle Fist, which suppresses the enemy's chakra, so I'm familiar with its flow. Techniques are clusters of chakra. If I can read its flow, splittin' 'em ain't so difficult.» Mukai exposed looking amused, and ran towards Shisui.

Shisui frowned. Although even Shisui himself had some more than average taijutsu skills, this opponent was a Gentle Fist user. He wasn't a guy at the level of taijutsu. He couldn't help but frown.

Itachi cast an extensive view of the whole development until now from afar.

They were within the territory of the Land of Fire, about three hours north of the Village of the Hidden Leaf. The three of them were fighting in a small basin that surrounded a slightly elevated mountain. The rocky mountain, in which not even a blade of grass grew, had as many places in which one person alone could hide as they pleased. Concealed by the handy shadow of a rock, Itachi was surveying the fight of the two.

The one who had been facing Mukai was just a Shadow Clone.

Itachi hadn't left his place from the beginning.

The opponent was a Gentle Fist user.

Killing him in a short-distance fight would be too difficult.

The match would be decided by one blow from a long distance.

The Sharingan was an ocular technique. It caught the opponent in a technique by pouring chakra into one's eyes. In short, if he was within the distance his eyes would arrive at, he could entrap the enemy.

The exchange of glances wasn't a thing that happened only in the subconscious. Thinking that it's a casual scenery, the enemy would make his gaze wander around. If his line of gaze and the line of gaze of the user of the technique meet only for a moment, he could cause a situation in which their gazes met without the opponent even noticing it.

Itachi was waiting for that moment. And for that reason Shisui was struggling hard to put Mukai's position in Itachi's line of gaze while daring to deal with a dangerous short-distance fight.

As long as he used the ocular technique of the Sharingan, he should make it somehow. If only he opened a seam in Mukai's mind, he could make his ocular technique gradually corrode it through the opening of that wound.

The problem was the blow of the beginning.

Mukai, who in addition to be well versed he was also a Byakugan user, a kekkei genkai that could feel and see the flow of chakra, understood the Sharingan perfectly of course.

It was a tactic to destroy that.

Shisui, who barely dodged Mukai's stab from the left, made his body bend backward.

Taking the opportunity, Mukai closed the distance between them.

Shisui jumped backward so that he turned around. That instant, Mukai's face was turned towards the shadow of the rock by which Itachi was concealed. But the line of gaze of both of them didn't cross yet.

With his eyes towards Shisui, who had landed, Mukai suddenly turned his face away. He had activated his Sharingan.

Of course, Shisui's Sharingan was a diversion. The place in which Mukai had turned his face was towards the shadow of the rock in which Itachi was hidden.

Itachi's gaze, who had sharpened his senses against the enemy, and Mukai's gaze, who had seized the scenery unconsciously, met...

They should have.

At the last possible moment, Mukai had kicked the ground and jumped.

An amazing jump.

When he landed, he jumped again kicking another rock.

He had discovered his location.

The moment before, Mukai had noticed Itachi's presence with the power of his Byakugan. Perhaps that moment he had also understood that he had activated the Sharingan.

Maybe to make sure of his intuition, or maybe to drag Itachi into the place of the fight.

Anyway, Mukai jumped in a straight line until the rock by which Itachi was hidden.

Itachi didn't miss the fact that Shisui smiled standing behind him.

Shisui disappeared.

Then, he appeared in front of Mukai's eyes.

«Tch!» Mukai clicked his tongue, and was knocked off the precipitous scraggy rocky place. Shisui's kick exploded onto his face.

"His skull has split." Itachi thought, and a familiar log reflected in his eyes.

«A Shadow Clone!»

«That's right...»

Itachi, who had let out a little shriek, heard Mukai's voice coming from behind him.

The Gentle Fist stance.

«Eight Trigrams, Two Palms.»

The heels of his left and right palm hit his stomach one after the other.

«Eight Trigrams, Four Palms.»

Four blows this time, without even time to breath.

«Eight Trigrams, Eight Palms.»

Mukai's consecutive blows attacked him mercilessly, as if he was sneering at Itachi's thoughts, who was groping for an opening to counterattack.

«Uoooooooo!»

A bitter shriek could be heard coming from Mukai's right side.

The side of the Byakugan.

Shisui's figure, who had released a flying kick, flickered at the margin of Itachi's field of vision, which was getting dim.

«Shisui...»

He had only time to mutter this, because Mukai assumed a defensive stance.

No.

The word "defensive" was simple. Mukai, who had avoided the flying kick just by tilting his face, grabbed Shisui's neck with his left hand, which was sticking out, and lifted him very high.

Mukai was holding up the body of a strong young man with one arm.

Shisui, who had his neck constricted, was writhing for his life. However, the five fingers that sank into his throat didn't come off by any means.

«"Trainin' " is workin' to overcome weak points. Coverin' with taijutsu the blind spot of my Byakugan, which appears only on one side, was the first step of my trainin'. You hadn't taken this old man very seriously, right, brat?»

«Kohinata Mukai...» Itachi called instinctively the name of the strong enemy in front of his eyes. While he didn't understand it himself, his legs took a step forward.

«What? D'you want me to kill him?»

Surely in that situation it would be no wonder if he had been taken like this. What kind of counterattack was left for Itachi now that he had been stubbornly smashed by the Gentle Fist, and the flow of the chakra inside his body had been stopped? Without any kind of plan, going on was an action that he couldn't even complain if it had been judged as an act of brutality.

But his legs didn't stop their advancement. Although he didn't even remember his orders, he simply took a step forward towards Mukai.

«In this case, I'll kill him, just as you wish.»

«Guuu!»

Mukai poured his strength onto the hand that was grabbing Shisui's neck. He intended on smashing his Adam's apple.

«Stop that!» Itachi yelled, and the Sharingan sparkled in his eyes.

«There's no way that such a blatant genjutsu'd work on me.» Mukai said, and turned his face away from Itachi.

In front of his eyes...

There was his friend's face.

«The Mangekyō Sharingan...» Shisui muttered.

His friend's eyes, who had turned crimson, had a shape different from the Sharingan Itachi had seen so far.

The Sharingan drew a small black dot in the centre of the eye, and in the circle, or rather in the outer circle, some comma-shaped dots floated in the shape of tomoe. Its strength changed depending on the number of the commas, but this shape itself was common within the clan.

However, Shisui's was different.

The commas of the three tomoe were united together, growing larger, the small black dot in the centre of the eye had disappeared, and had moulded into a crimson hole. If a normal Sharingan's percentage of red and black was in the order of eight versus two, that of Shisui's current eyes seemed to be a competition of five versus five.

Shisui's eyes and Mukai's eyes met perhaps for less than a thousandth of a second.

Being caught completely in a normal Sharingan or not was just a matter of a moment.

Shisui didn't miss that moment.

Surely Mukai should have fallen into the genjutsu...

«Mukai!» Shisui, who had untied his restriction, shouted surprised. In front of his eyes, there was Mukai's figure collapsing while emitting a splash of blood from his stomach. Itachi stared at him standing stock-still.

He had sliced his own stomach.

The moment Shisui activated his Sharingan, Mukai, who had stiffened his body, had fetched a kunai from his breast pocket and had suddenly torn his stomach apart in a straight line.

«Pull yourself together Mukai!» Shisui yelled while holding Mukai's head, crouching.

«I'm a spy of the other village... if somethin' meddles with my brain, a technique activates so that I'll end my own life. I can't be helped anymore.»

Mukai had a coughing fit, and blood gushed out of his mouth.

«I-it's the first time I've seen a guy that catches people in an ocular technique like that... what the heck was that?»

«...»

Shisui didn't answer.

«Is it an Uchiha secret technique...»

Worrying about Shisui, who was faltering, Itachi called Mukai.

«Is there something you want to say?»

«T-to think that things turned out to be like this... T-the things I did, they're things that I decided only by my own resolve... my wife and the brats have nothin' to do with it...»

«Do you mean that the betrayal is just your own crime?»

«Maybe it's askin' too much, but...»

His trembling hand looked for something in his breast pocket. Itachi fetched the object of his intention, brushing Mukai's fingers aside.

He picked one cigarette from the pack, and held it out to Mukai's mouth.

«F-fire...»

This time, Shisui fetched a lighter from his pocket, and lit the point of the cigarette.

When he inhaled deeply holding the cigarette in his mouth, and the smoke reached the depths of his lungs, Mukai blew out the smoke as if he was savouring it.

«What a sad sight for the death of a shinobi... I'll be waitin' on the other side...»

The hand that was holding the cigarette between its fingers fell, losing all its strength, and Mukai stayed still.

«It's over.» Shisui said, his voice trembling with tiredness.

Itachi nodded silently and changed his reply.

«About your Sharingan of before...»

Shisui muttered still staring at Mukai's face.

«You'll keep the secret with the guys of the village, won't you?»

«Yeah.»

«The Mangekyō Sharingan...» Shisui said, and his eyes reflected again that strange pattern of the Sharingan.

«When the time comes, I'll tell you everything.»

Itachi felt an irresistible attraction towards the unknown power that his friend was keeping to himself.

3

«Team Ro...»

Itachi was staring standing at attention as Danzō muttered and lowered his eyes on a document.

It was Danzō's room of the residence assigned to the "Root". He, who was sitting in front of an ebony desk, was leaning his left elbow on the armrest, and hadn't turned his eyes towards Itachi at all as he held the documents with his right hand.

«Captain, Hatake Kakashi.»

«Yes.» Itachi answered briefly.

He had been bothered by the man that was standing next to Danzō for quite a while.

He was a man of the Root who wore a White Tiger mask. It's not that there was some distinct reason. But somehow he was bothered by that man. His eyes, through the round

holes opened in the white mask, had been staring at Itachi from before, as if he was glaring at him. That wily gaze was blowing his mind for some reason.

«That man's excellent.» Danzō said assertively.

Hatake Kakashi...

After practically no time that Itachi had become a shinobi, he had been rescued by him. During the daimyō escort mission, they had been attacked by an unidentified man and Tenma, from his same team, had been killed. Itachi, who hadn't awakened his Sharingan yet, had resigned himself even to die for the difference of his overwhelming ability.

However, the man disappeared suddenly murmuring Kakashi's name. Even now he didn't know the distinct reason why the man had disappeared that time. However, He was sure that the man disappeared muttering Kakashi's name. Maybe he was afraid of his power, or maybe it was for some other reason. There was no way to check it out now.

«There's darkness in that man. That's a very important factor for the Anbu.»

Darkness...

Did he have it himself?

Itachi wondered.

«Relax. There's enough darkness in you, too.» Danzō said as if he had seen through his mind. Itachi, who had already experienced it many times, wasn't very much surprised. If one excelled at discerning his opponent's mental state, it was possible that he'd express an answer to their thoughts anticipating them with a certain degree of conjecture.

Danzō was only making use of this ability.

«I've arranged the celebration for your change of assignment.» Danzō said, and stood up tossing the documents on the desk. He put the ebony chair away under the desk, and looked at Itachi standing next to the man with the tiger mask. Then he put a hand on the man's shoulder, and made a strangely cheerful smile.

«I've decided to lend this man to Team Ro.»

Also Danzō's Root was one portion of the Anbu, but it was completely detached from the Anbu under the Third Hokage's direct control for its leadership and its chain of command. Itachi had heard that for this reason there weren't frequent exchanges of both information and people within the Anbu.

«Don't worry, you'll certainly get Hiruzen's permission.»

Once again Danzō spat out his remarks as if he had read his mind. Itachi couldn't bring himself to like this haughty manner of speaking, no matter how many times he heard it.

«Nice to meet you. My name is Sugaru.» the man with the tiger mask said suddenly.

Maybe there was something stuck in his throat or something, but all the rough and dry sounds blended in his voice, and he had a difficult voice to understand.

«Sugaru caught a serious illness of the throat when he was a child, and since then his voice can't get out well.»

«The difficult thing are missions in which I need to talk, but apart from that I can do anything.»

There was an uncomfortable feeling in that voice, but he had a light tone of voice. It seemed that he had a sociable character.

«You can make use of this man as if he were your own limbs.»

«My own limbs?»

«Yes.» Sugaru answered the question Itachi had asked Danzō.

«I'm a member of the "Root". Danzō-sama's orders are absolute. So, if he orders me to become Itachi-san's limbs, even if you're younger than me, I'm ready to sacrifice my life for you.» Sugaru stated with a quite indifferent cynicism. Itachi stared at Danzō without even smiling.

«I can make it alone in the Anbu.»

«Don't take it too seriously. On the outside, Sugaru has been lent to Team Ro from the Root. Even the captain Kakashi doesn't know his relationship with you. You won't have to mind Sugaru in particular. However, Sugaru will constantly safeguard your security.»

«My security? Are you saying that I'm being targeted by someone?»

«The first Uchiha in the Anbu, a mere eleven-year-old. It's a title that will get enough prejudices and envy.»

«...»

Of course, the moment he met Team Ro, on his way to the training ground that was their meeting place, he had received a baptism of kunai from his comrades. It didn't mean that they hit him directly, but endless kunai had fallen from the sky. It was a silent pressure that had completely obstructed his way to the training ground. Itachi had walked indifferently without avoiding them or protesting and had come out of it.

Kakashi, who had noticed his comrades' behaviour, had admonished them, but there had been no one who had truly regretted it.

«I have a high opinion of you. I don't want you to die prematurely for the jealousy of your comrades.»

«If someone tries to attack me...»

«Don't underestimate the shinobi of the Anbu.» Danzō cut off Itachi's words.

«The closer you get to the core of the village, the more are the people who aren't pleasant with the Uchiha. It wouldn't be strange at all if there were a party that would kill you pretending that you died during a mission. What would the Uchiha clan think if you die?»

«Don't tell me...»

«I'm saying that even this unexpected situation is possible.»

Danzō nodded firmly to confirm Itachi's thoughts.

Itachi dies during a mission. His father and the others suspect that it's a conspiracy of the people of the village. Itachi's death would probably become like a triggering explosive for the people that are dissatisfied for the clan's situation. When he thought that his death could become the trigger of a coup d'état, Itachi felt a shiver running through his spine.

«In this situation you already have a great duty towards both the village and the clan.»

Danzō left Sugaru's side, stood in front of Itachi going around the desk, and gently touched his shoulder.

«You have to become the bridge between the village and your clan, so live long, Itachi.»

Danzō said the same things his father had said.

The Village of the Hidden Leaf and the Uchiha clan...

Were those existences that could stand one next to the other?

The Uchiha clan as well was supposed to be among the people who lived in the Village of the Hidden Leaf. In this case, wasn't the relationship with the two opposing each other unnatural to begin with? Why did Konoha want to control the Uchiha completely? Why were his fellow clansmen dissatisfied with the village to that extent, even though they were even granted autonomy?

An existence that connected both.

A channel, if you asked his father.

A bridge, if you asked Danzō.

Either way, it was the same.

«I'll protect your life. Fulfil your duties as an Anbu at ease. Uchiha Itachi.» Danzō said looking satisfied, and Itachi replied with a little bow, and left immediately the room.

*

«It's been quite a while...» Izumi said, still looking downward.

Itachi was in a small park in the clan's district. Also his entrance in the Anbu had ended without problems, and it was evening when he finished his report to Danzō.

When he was standing at the gate of the district, he met Izumi on her way home after a mission by chance. Without even either one of the two asked it, they spontaneously walked into the park. Izumi sat on a swing, and Itachi sat on a bench behind it.

«Sorry for that time.»

«That time?» Itachi asked back, and Izumi looked at him over her shoulder while she kept rocking the swing.

«See, at the tea-house of the village...»

He remembered.

Izumi was apologising for having got angry and having stormed out of the shop.

Come to think of it, they were talking for the first time after that. A lot of things had happened since then, and Itachi hadn't had time to think about Izumi to be honest. That's why he had completely forgot about the incident at the tea-house until a moment ago.

Even if she was apologised now, Itachi hadn't got angry that time, so he didn't have any doubt if excuse her or not.

«Excuse me, too.»

«What are you apologising for, Itachi-kun?»

«I didn't thought that you were so troubled about it, Izumi.»

«Haha...»

Izumi swung high in front of her.

«What is it?»

«I was thinking that it's typical of you, Itachi-kun.» Izumi said in a bright tone as if she was in a good mood. Itachi didn't understand that sudden change of mood.

Itachi thought that her mood was already been perturbed as it was now, and tried to change the topic.

«How are your missions going?»

«Compared to yours, Itachi-kun, they're not a big deal.» Izumi said, and revolved in midair kicking the swing. She made a rotation in front of her, and landed completely.

Izumi looked back, with both her thin arms still opened at left and right.

«Rather conveniently, I've been employed for looking after the pet of the daimyō's wife, and assisting moving of the Land of Fire's public offices.»

«Is that so...»

Itachi's lips smiled spontaneously. Hearing that Izumi hadn't been going through dangerous missions, he relaxed.

He tried to skirt the answer to the question why he was relieved.

Itachi himself thought that he was half fledged and still had some way to go as a shinobi.

That's why he had not spare time to think about Izumi in earnest.

“I wanted to walk the same path with a person I like... Is that a crime to think something like that?”

He believed he understood Izumi's feelings, who had left saying those things.

But he couldn't reciprocate them.

«Say, Itachi-kun.»

«What?»

«If... just supposing. If you hadn't become a shinobi, what do you think you'd have become, Itachi-kun?»

«I've never thought about it.»

Itachi lived at his shinobi parent's side. And he had never had any doubt that he'd become a shinobi. He thought that only a shinobi could obtain the power he needed for fulfilling his dream to erase the conflicts of this world.

That's why he couldn't think about any other path except that of a shinobi.

«Is that so...»

Izumi looked down, lonely.

«So you joined the Anbu.»

«Did you hear about it?»

«There's no one in the district that doesn't know it.»

The Anbu was a strongly secretive department. Even the shinobi that belonged to it were requested not to divulge their identity as much as possible.

Itachi's inauguration in the Anbu had already spread though the district... The strength of unity of the clan was renowned, but was it really okay that the information leaked so much? What would happen if they spoke easily of words like coup d'état and even the centre of the village heard about it?

«Hey, Itachi-kun.»

Izumi's voice called Itachi back to reality.

«I'm scared.»

«What?»

«I have the sensation that you're steadily going further and further away, Itachi-kun...»

Suddenly he received a shock in his chest.

Izumi's head was below his neck.

«I-Izumi...»

«I-I'm sorry Itachi-kun. But let me stay here for a little while more.»

«...»

Itachi didn't know what to do, and waited for Izumi to calm down.

«W-we're still eleven-year-old... And despite it, Itachi-kun, you're already... Hey, Itachi-kun, where are you going?»

«I'm not going anywhere.»

Maybe...

Itachi swallowed the last word.

4

«You're a little disappointed, aren't you?» the man in a fox mask told Itachi, who was standing near a modest door. He was standing opposite to Itachi, interposing the door between them.

He added some other words towards Itachi, who had kept silent.

«Just because we're Anbu, it doesn't mean that the missions are always dangerous. Also guarding the Hokage is a legitimate mission.»

«I see.» Itachi answered simply. Just like the man, his face was concealed by a fox mask. The holes that had been opened where Itachi's eyes were were circular, unlike the man's, which were almond-shaped.

The name of the man that was wearing the mask with the almond-shaped eyes was Hatake Kakashi. He was the captain of the Anbu Team Ro, and had been assigned as Itachi's immediate boss. He was a young man still twenty more or less, but he had been a member of the Anbu, which was the village's elite, for eight years already. He was skilled, and he had also the Hokage's trust.

Itachi knew about this man from before.

That time when Tenma died...

Kakashi was the one who came to rescue them. If that time Kakashi had appeared a little earlier, maybe Tenma wouldn't have died.

The fact that Tenma had died was a reality that didn't upset him. Itachi didn't intend on thinking about "if" and holding a grudge.

«Have you learned the Anbu's basic tactics?»

Kakashi threw a safe question. He was a good superior that considered his young subordinate's feeling, who had just entered.

"Friend Killer".

These were the words that those who badmouthed Kakashi always addressed him with. Even Itachi had heard it many times since he joined the Anbu.

However, those were all words of people who were content with a position of subordinate despite being older than Kakashi. That was nothing but defamation out of jealousy and envy.

"Captain Kakashi kills even his comrades if it's to fulfil the mission..."

The faces of the people who spoke ill of him unfairly were always mean.

It didn't seem to Itachi that Kakashi's behaviour was bad.

For a shinobi, a mission was supposed to be more important than life. If they became a hindrance to the execution of a mission, in the shinobi world you had to kill your comrades. Moreover, the place where he had put himself was the Anbu, where the elite of the village was gathered. The Anbu carried out shady tasks such as assassinations. Its position had to be the most severe among the shinobi of the village regarding the fulfilment of missions.

Then the people of the Anbu that used the defamation "Kakashi the Friend Killer" couldn't help but be ridiculous.

Normally he never heard speeches that mocked comrades, at least from Kakashi. On the contrary, the speeches in which he aimed at honouring the bonds between comrades stood out. Actually he worried about Itachi, who had recently joined the Anbu, and was eagerly trying to start a conversation.

Without looking towards his kind captain, Itachi opened his mouth straightening his body.

«I've memorised it from start to end.»

«As I expected.»

For Itachi, who had read a large number of books concerning the practical use of shinobi units, the system of tactics characteristic of the Anbu was extremely interesting.

Four-man cells, three-man cells, two-man cells. On top of that, even the way of behaving when you're alone. In all the situations in which shinobi meet in a mission, the tactics typical of actual fights that looked for the possibility of carrying out the mission from an offensive position were included. It was specialised in the achievement of a mission, anything and everything for crushing the enemy, even cooperation and military formations of diversions, derangements, defence.

Itachi had finished reading the massive book of the special tactics of the Anbu in one evening, driven by intellectual curiosity.

«You weren't called the most talented genius of the Academy for nothing.»

«What are you saying, you graduated when you were younger.»

«The time when I graduated was a period in the midst of the Great War when shinobi were needed by all costs, now the situation is different.»

To be fair, also the organization of the current Academy was different from when Itachi had graduated. When Itachi had graduated, there were still the vestiges of the Great War. For this reason if your true strength was acknowledged, you could skip a grade, and graduate early. But in the recent peaceful days it was the Hokage's will that they had to raise the shinobi seriously, taking long months and years, and they couldn't graduate in a short time like in the old days. As a result, no matter how talented Sasuke was, he wouldn't become a shinobi unless he turned eleven.

«I've only memorising it. Unless I try to face movements and comrades in practice, I can't say if I learned it.»

«In your case, you'll be fine.» Kakashi said as if he had seen him. In that sound he couldn't feel at all the irresponsibility of an excessive expectation, or negligence, or pride. It was a quite natural tone. That's why had had a strange persuasive power.

«I hope that the place of the Anbu will become a proud thing for you.»

«Thank you.»

A boss he could trust...

There was something in that man called Kakashi that made him think so.

*

No matter how many times he went there, he couldn't bring himself to like that place...

In the shrine, ruled by an excited atmosphere, Itachi breathed in from his nose.

Filling all the seats around him, his fellow clansmen.

It was a regular meeting.

There was also Izumi, who had become a genin. Itachi, who was a novice, sat on a lower sit. Also Izumi was sitting on the same row, several people away from him. Overpowered by the excessive excitement, he was completely motionless, his face still covered. He wanted to greet her, but in the shrine, which was deadly silent in contrast to the excitement, there was a silent pressure that didn't allow any rash behaviour.

«Well then, let's begin.»

His father, who was sitting in the front row, stood up, and turned his body towards everybody. Everyone held their breath, waiting for his father's words. That scene somehow looked like the founder of a sect and his devotees.

A leader that carries the clan's hatred on his shoulders...

That was the dark face of Itachi's father, Fugaku.

«It has been officially decided that my son, Itachi, will enlist in the Anbu. He has already begun performing missions as an Anbu.»

A quiet cheering resounded through the shrine.

«Because of that, our clan has a channel that connects it to the core of the village. That's why not only we're spied by the village, but also we will spy them.»

His father wasn't the one who put that into practice.

«Itachi.»

His father called his son's name. Without making any sound Itachi stood up, and waited for his father's words in his place.

«Is there something you noticed while you joined the Anbu?»

That overly vague question made Itachi perplexed. The people of the village had some prejudices against the clan, and weren't pleased with them. Probably his father was expecting an answer like that. His comrades of the Anbu hadn't really welcomed Itachi's admission, and there were people who had harassed him ostentatiously. However, he couldn't say for sure that those things had been done for the sole reason that he was a member of the Uchiha clan. Also Itachi's eleven-year-old immaturity was a cause that irritated them.

«The reality is that the people of the village are cautious against the Uchiha clan, and aren't pleased with us.»

«Right!»

At Itachi, who had thrown up the words that were near his father's wished answer, shouts of agreement raised from the seats.

«However...» Itachi continued while putting weight in his voice, repressing their hasty jeering.

«Nevertheless, I don't feel an active hate that inflicts a persecution on the clan. I keep thinking that their feelings are similar to the jealousy and envy that anybody has.»

His father's right eyebrow, who was listening with his arms crossed, lifted with a twitch.

«You're saying that their jealousy and envy will turn into a big wave of feelings gathered together.»

His fellow clansmen began stirring, agreeing with his father's words. Pushing his way through the voices of the crowd, Itachi began spitting out his words putting his whole strength into them.

«If we keep accumulating pessimistic predictions like this, everything will be reduced to a negative phenomenon!»

One man stood up, blocking his way in front of his father, who was glaring at his son as he kept silent.

He was his father's trusted friend, Uchiha Yashiro.

«Oi, Itachi.»

Letting his killing intent fill his narrow eyes, Yashiro called him. Still in silence, Itachi kept staring at his father's trusted friend.

«You're supporting the village pretty much, aren't you. Who the heck are you friend with, the village or the clan? Isn't that entering the Anbu has weakened even your judgement for your self-interest?»

«It's better not to put things in a frame with words...»

«What?»

Yashiro asked back to Itachi's muttering.

Itachi's eyes were faintly flashing crimson.

«Enemy... friends... when you classify things by means of words, true feelings go out of sight. It turns out that you have to step into a place that would be better not stepping into.»

«We have no time to waste with questions and answers that make no sense. Who are you friend with? Uchiha Itachi!»

Yashiro's angry roar made the shrine sunk into silence.

«I've decided...»

Still glaring at his father's trusted friend, Itachi continued.

«I'm a member of the Uchiha clan.»

*

«Do you have a minute?»

On his way home after the meeting ended, Itachi, who was walking detached from his father, was called out by Shisui. His father, who wasn't sure that his son had been called, looked back, and noticed his son's friend.

«What is it, Shisui?»

«I'd like to talk with your son for a little while...»

Fugaku, who looked alternatively at Shisui and his son, said only «Don't be too late.», and began walking in the street at night alone.

«Shisui...»

When there were just the two of them, Itachi called his friend's name.

«I understand you so much it hurts.» his friend said with a crease between his eyebrows, and looked bitter from the depth of his heart.

«Yashiro is the head of the party that promotes the coup d'état. For that man the people of the village are all enemies.»

The rash remarks he had been attacked with some time ago were ringing inside his ears even now. Itachi bowed his head as if to turn his eyes away from Yashiro's figure that was floating in his mind.

«Like you joined the Anbu, I started to move, too.»

«What do you mean?»

«Demanding it directly to the Hokage-sama, I obtained the jurisdiction of investigating the clan's internal condition independently.»

What the hell did it mean investigating the clan's internal condition? Itachi was perplexed for those words that he couldn't understand right away, and Shisui, realising that, opened his mouth.

«In order not to let the clan increase its turbulent movements any further, I'll be dispensed from common missions. The clan's dissatisfaction will explode. To prevent it before it happens, with the firm promise that I can raise an action with my own discernment I obtained a position as a member of the Anbu. But that's a thing in name, I'm treated as under the Hokage-sama's direct control. That's why not even your father and the others know that I joined the Anbu, and the people who know that I'm a member of the organization as well are few.»

«Don't tell me that you also told the Hokage-sama...»

«Don't worry, I hadn't went as far as telling him about the coup d'état.»

If the village knew the clan's conspiracy, he would clearly see that there wouldn't be a situation in which both parties would mutually restrain each other like now.

«Itachi, you from inside the organization of the Anbu, and I from the position of a shinobi under the Hokage-sama's direct control, from now on we'll fight to stop any accidental discharge of the clan.»

«I won't forget this pact with you, no matter what.»

Shisui held out his fist. Itachi pushed out his fist, making them meet.

«We have to stop a coup d'état at all costs.»

At Shisui's firm voice, Itachi nodded in approval.

5

A scene he didn't want to believe was spreading in front of his eyes.

In the room without windows that was below the building assigned to the Anbu, some monitors had been installed one next to the other. Reflected in those, there were many scenes that were familiar for Itachi.

«The Nine-Tails attack... The higher-ups of the village suspected the Uchiha clan's involvement.»

Itachi heard Kakashi speaking standing next to him as he kept staring at the monitors.

«The higher-ups of the village, who weren't satisfied with just isolating the clan's district at the margins of the village, began a round-the-clock surveillance of the district with the Anbu.»

«And this is the place?»

«Yeah.»

By means of countless buttons and levers that were in front of the monitors, his comrades of the Anbu were processing the pictures. Despite they were wearing a mask and their expressions couldn't be seen, he could guess that everyone's face was relaxed. His comrades were completely relaxed to that point.

No wonder about it. From his comrades' point of view, looking at the monitors was nothing but a monotone mission. They didn't even realised how serious that situation was for the Uchiha clan.

«Have all of us being watched?»

«Probably there's no need to check on you one by one, but the fact is...»

«I see. I absolutely won't inform the clan.»

It was impossible for him to say it.

If they knew the truth that every nook of the district had been incessantly guarded 24/7, his father and the other's wrath would probably get more violent than ever. It would only offer them, who were already noisy about a coup d'état under normal circumstances, a convenient excuse.

For his father, Itachi had been sent in the Anbu as a spy that would inform them of the village's internal situation. If he had fulfilled this duty faithfully, he probably should have informed the clan about this reality right away.

In case he renounced to tell them, Itachi would renounce to be the spy of the clan as well.

«From now on, you'll be given one day of surveillance here.»

«Do you mean that I have to guard my comrades of the clan?»

A man with a monkey mask, who had been listening silently to this exchange between Itachi and Kakashi sitting in front of a monitor, suddenly stood up.

«Comrades or not, a mission is a mission. Your clan had lured the Nine-Tails in. That's why you're guarded like this. Accept the truth, newbie.»

«Kō!» Kakashi called the name of the man in the monkey mask to rebuke him. Thereupon, another co-worker that was sitting next to Kō turned the mask towards Kakashi, making his chair turn around. It was a round cat mask.

«This guy had his younger sister killed by the Nine-Tails. That's why he doesn't have a good impression of the Uchiha clan.»

«Don't interpose your personal feelings in the mission.» Kakashi said, and Kō and approached him while casting his eyes down.

«I understand, excuse me.»

He passed by Kakashi's side bowing his head quickly.

«Well then, I'm counting on you, newbie.»

The one with the round cat mask followed after Kō, who has spoke looking unsatisfied.

«Oh, here you are.» Kakashi said while looking towards the door the two had disappeared.

«I entrust you to him.»

The one standing in front of the door was the shinobi that was at Danzō's side, Sugaru.

Already four hours or so had passed since Kakashi left.

Sugaru hadn't uttered a single word. Itachi, whose strong point wasn't conversing casually anyway, didn't worry about silence. But hours were passing with the two of them doing nothing but staring at the monitors.

He spotted **that** by chance.

Although it was a mission, Itachi's blood wasn't cool to the point of being able to carry out a behaviour like guarding his fellow clansmen's lives calmly. He kept making the scenes in front of his eyes change, renewing incessantly the images of the surveillance cameras and trying not to stay in the same place as much as possible. And somehow he maintained his presence of mind by gazing long at the series of moments. Itachi, who was gaining experience in memorising the sights at first glance, had the pretension that he was carrying out his professional duties enough with this conduct.

Then, in the fragment of an instant Itachi had an uncomfortable feeling, and stopped his hand.

A composition that had a commanding view of the Naka Shrine from a torii. The pathway of the stone paving extended straight towards the main building of the shrine from the stone torii.

The space exactly in the middle between this torii and the main shrine seemed slightly distorted to Itachi.

It was a matter of just one moment.

The scene that was projected on the monitor regained its stillness. Perhaps Sugaru hadn't noticed, there was a slight disturbance of the screen. Even if someone else had tried to look, it was a change so slight that they'd only think the camera had been shaken by the wind.

However, Itachi remembered the disturbance of the current scene.

The scene near the centre of the stone paving was disturbed at the centre of a certain point in the form of a spiral. The scene was just as if the space around that point was being sucked up.

The masked man...

The phenomenon that was happening on the other side of the monitor was the same as the jutsu the man that had attacked Itachi and the others used to escape, during the daimyō of the Land of Fire's escort mission.

«Why that man...»

After he muttered it carelessly, Itachi regretted it, aware of Sugaru's presence. Sugaru was observing the monitor in front of his eyes. While he regretted his own inexperience, Itachi dove into the sea of his thoughts again.

The time when Tenma died, Itachi had clearly seen the eyes of the man flashing behind the mask. A black dot had floated at the centre of his deep crimson eyes, and three comma-shaped marks in the concentric circle. That man's left eye was a Sharingan for sure. And that had to mean that the man was a member of the Uchiha clan.

More than three years had passed from that incident.

Even now sometimes the spectacle of Tenma's death was recalled in his mind. Tenma had died with the expression of someone who didn't understand what had happened, with panic still clumsily affixed on his face. That time, Itachi was astonished for the difference of the overwhelming ability that there was between that man and himself. He was disappointed for his own helplessness, and had awakened the Sharingan.

To be honest, the masked man had become the person that made Itachi awaken as a true Uchiha shinobi.

An enemy of his associates, or a benefactor.

He felt a strange bond with the masked man.

In those three years, Itachi had dreamt about the true identity of that man on countless occasions.

He thought that the Uchiha clan was a mysterious category, but today that changed into a conviction.

The blur of the picture was the masked man's fault. Then, that man had appeared at the Naka Shrine. Then, the day Tenma died a Sharingan had sparkled behind the mask.

Everything pointed out that he was in the Uchiha clan.

Then who the hell in the clan was he?

In the three years after that, Itachi had come in contact with all the people of the clan that lived in the village. There was no one in the clan that had a ninjutsu that manipulated the space like that man's. There weren't people who had a voice of presence similar to that man, either.

Then Itachi himself more than anything had the instinct that that man was no one of the village.

Then who?

The Uchiha clan had been living in the village since the foundation of Konoha. He had never heard of someone who had the Sharingan except the Uchiha clan. There was an exception, like Hatake Kakashi, but even that was a story within Konoha. If precious kekkei genkai, like the Sharingan and the Byakugan, leaked out of the village, that was a serious affair for the country. There's no way that it'd be left put of the village's records. At present, there was no story that the Sharingan had leaked in the other villages.

If they thought so, the alternatives naturally were narrowed down.

In the first alternative, there was the possibility that a member of the Uchiha clan that was believed to have died in the previous Great War or in another war had survived, and become the masked man.

It had been decided that during the wars, if a member of the Uchiha died in a battlefield, the Sharingan would be brought back home by the other shinobi, without exception.

That's why there was no possibility that it had been stolen from a corpse. If that was the case, it was more suitable to think that a person who was thought to have died had survived, and had set foot into the district while still having the Sharingan.

Then in the second alternative, there was the possibility that the masked man was a person that had parted from the Uchiha before.

That probability was even lower than the first alternative. Because that was only one person who had left the village, parting from the clan.

Uchiha Madara...

He was the man who had founded the Village of the Hidden Leaf together with Hashirama of the Senju clan. They said that he had left the village, and died fighting with Hashirama in the place that was now called the "Valley of the End".

It was impossible that a person who died was alive. In this case, he had to discard the second alternative.

But Itachi couldn't forget about that second alternative, no matter what he did. That time, the presence and the overwhelming chakra of the masked man that he actually felt on his skin were stronger than any other shinobi Itachi had met so far.

If a shinobi of that calibre had died during the Great War, he should have been remained in the history. But there wasn't a description that such skilled Uchiha shinobi had died anywhere in the written accounts of the Great War.

In that case...

Itachi was more satisfied in thinking that Madara was alive.

«...*tachi*.»

Someone was calling him from afar.

«*Itachi*.»

Sugaru's stiff voice brought Itachi back to reality.

«*It's almost time for the shift*.»

«Aah...» Itachi answered vaguely. Even if he indulged in his thoughts, the point of his fingers had kept pressing the buttons. The monitor, which he wasn't seeing at all as he turned his eyes to it, constantly changed the pictures.

«*Are you all right?*»

«What do you mean?» he answered with a question to Sugaru's question.

«*No... nothing in particular*.»

After that, Sugaru didn't talk anymore.

6

The second month was about to pass since he joined the Anbu. However, the days continued monotone as usual. The substance of his main tasks were things like guarding the Hokage office and practicing with his comrades, and the missions in which he exposed his life to danger still hadn't returned.

"If assassinations and important missions were so frequent, you couldn't say that the village is peaceful. The fact that we have free time is the proof that there's peace."

Kakashi said, and smiled optimistically.

The village was peaceful...

"And yet, why" Itachi thought.

If the village was supposed to be at peace, why was his heart so upset? Why he had the feeling of being so urged?

It was the clan's fault.

Behind the scenes of the peace of the village, his fellow clansmen were wishing for a riot.

That was the main cause of Itachi's heart's unrest.

He had to prevent a coup d'état, no matter what. However, he didn't find any specific plan. Even if he had tried to say he'd move with Shisui, even if both of them had extended their hands to each other, the clan's impetus was uncontrollable.

The fact that he hadn't found any breakthrough solution made Itachi impatient.

«Gyahahaha!»

A loud piercing voice penetrated Itachi's ears on his way home after a mission.

In front of Itachi's field of vision, who had stopped his feet instinctively, there was a small park. It was already a late hour, it was evening. The sun had set at west long ago, and everything near him had begun being wrapped in a very dim light.

The boy who had burst into laughter before was standing on a swing. In the direction he was looking to, there were three human silhouettes running away.

Maybe they were his friends.

«You guys are no match for Uzumaki Naruto-sama dattebayo!» the boy of the swing yelled.

The human figures were leaving while talking to each other without even turning around towards the boy for some reason. The boy, who had called himself Naruto while staring at the three figures that looked in good terms, sat on the swing looking lonely.

To all appearance, the words of before were just a bluff.

After the boy gave off his name, Itachi recognised him.

There wasn't a single person in the village that didn't know Uzumaki Naruto.

The boy in front of his eyes was involved in the Nine-Tails attack that had terrified the villagers. He was the child in whose body the Nine-Tails was dwelling. Whenever he walked a road, everyone lowered their voices. There was just one person that didn't know that the Nine-Tails was dwelling in his body.

Naruto himself.

It had been sealed in his body before he could even be aware of the calamity of the village, and lived while being feared by everyone.

Naruto didn't understand why he was being tyrannised by everyone. Both his parents were not in this world anymore. There was no one to pour their unconditional love into him.

For some reason, Itachi turned his steps towards the park. He calmly walked towards the swing, that was rocking feebly.

He sat next to Uzumaki Naruto.

«Whoa!»

Noticing that Itachi had appeared all of a sudden, Naruto almost fell off the swing in surprise. Thrashing his arms and legs confusedly beyond necessity, he remained in the swing somehow, and threw a suspicious look towards Itachi.

«Don't frighten me like that 'ttebayo!»

«Sorry.»

«Err, who are you?»

Naruto stared at him with round eyes. Itachi turned his eyes right towards him while rocking the swing.

«It doesn't matter who I am.»

«I mustn't talk with strangers, my mum...»

«You haven't one.» Itachi said, and Naruto put his right hand behind his head expressing a smile that looked like an embarrassed grin.

«You know that too?»

«Uzumaki Naruto is famous for being a mischievous brat.»

«Am I that much of a celebrity?»

«In some way.»

«He he he...»

Without catching Itachi's irony, Naruto smiled happily.

«Your friends ran away.»

«Guys like those who don't understand my pranks aren't my friends 'ttebayo.»

Naruto's voice was awfully cheerful. It seemed that he was behaving frantically cheerfully not to show his loneliness.

Everybody knew Naruto's true identity.

The Nine-Tails attack towards the village had left deep scars even now. Even the Uchiha clan, which was suspected of having manipulated the Nine-Tails, still couldn't escape from the effects of the attack. Itachi himself had sustained many times a defamation without having being responsible because of that incident. Maybe he was the only person in this village that came in contact with that boy, in whose body the main cause of it was dwelling.

Naruto was the biggest victim of the Nine-Tails incident, so to speak.

Itachi didn't know how they sealed the Nine-Tails in Naruto's body in detail. However, he thought that they had no decent sense if they sealed that cluster of calamity in a newborn baby. Hadn't they thought about how much that child would be persecuted if they did such thing?

The details of the Nine-Tails attack were top secret in the village. The truth had been hidden into the darkness, only Naruto was left.

Naruto was part of the darkness of the village.

The village consisted of while sacrificing existences like Naruto.

A member of the upper reaches had sealed that calamity inside Naruto, diverted people's dissatisfaction by persecuting the Uchiha clan, and kept pulling the strings of the village deftly.

To hide their own darkness by generating intentionally other darkness...

And the truth was that also Itachi was part of the village's darkness.

Because the Anbu was the true darkness of the village.

«Young mister!»

«Nh?»

Naruto was staring at him with big round eyes.

«You fell silent all of a sudden, are you alright?»

«I'm okay.»

«Good.»

Naruto had asked it with upturned eyes, looking worried.

«It's almost time to go back home.»

«Since there's no one to go back home with...»

Naruto acted though, turning the corners of his mouth down.

«Well then, I'll go back home.»

«Eeh!»

Naruto looked exaggeratedly surprised to Itachi, who had stood up.

«Good luck.»

Itachi thought that those words he spat out could hardly help him. However, Naruto rubbed his nose with a finger while grinning out loud, looking happy. Then he jumped vigorously from the swing, and pointed his index at Itachi standing straight.

«My name is Uzumaki Naruto! I'll become Hokage one day dattebayo!»

«Really, Hokage...»

A fire was lit in Itachi's chest.

Even if he was burdened by the darkness of the village, that boy hadn't resigned himself to his destiny. Without holding a grudge towards the village, without hating people, he had faith in his dream with honest eyes.

«I hope you will.»

«Of course I will 'ttebayo. I'll better keep that in mind until that time, young mister.»

Giving him a smile in reply, Itachi turned his back on Naruto, and walked away.

The stars were sparkling in the whole sky.

*

He had been called by Danzō.

Next to the head of the "Root", who was sitting on a chair with a sour look, there was Sugaru's figure, who was supposed to belong to Team Ro.

«How's the Anbu?»

«I don't know yet.»

«A honest feeling. You'll end up gaining experience that you couldn't do if it weren't for the Anbu many times after this. Until then, polish your skills.»

Danzō spoke as if he was his direct boss. But Itachi, who was an Anbu under the Hokage's direct control, wasn't connected to the Root. On the surface, Danzō and Itachi had no professional relationship whatsoever.

«What I want to say is, I called you today.»

He silently incited Danzō's words.

«I heard that the Uchiha clan's district has been strict with the outsiders lately.»

Surely, it was true that these last few months the district was having an exclusive atmosphere. That apparently was for the fact that the district itself was determined because his father had been speaking of a coup d'état.

«You take part to the regular meeting as well, right?» Danzō asked without beating about the bush.

The Uchiha clan was being guarded 24/7 with the Anbu. It was quite natural that Danzō knew about the meetings.

«Yes.» Itachi, who had prepared himself to the worst since there was no point in hiding it, answered right away. Danzō nodded firmly, looking satisfied.

«Let's say it frankly. I want you to inform me about the contents of the meetings.»

That voice, with a hidden pressure that implied he couldn't say yes or no, hit Itachi.

«If this goes on, the Uchiha clan will fall into ruin. In order to stop that, I need your strength.»

«Do you mean that I'll have to betray my clan for you?»

«Not betray. Protect.»

Danzō placed both his elbows on the desk, and put his chin on his crossed palms. His left eye, just like a deep dark hole, hit Itachi.

«Betraying is an act that gives a disadvantage to the person that's betrayed. The behaviour of informing me about the contents of the meetings will prevent a clan's accidental discharge before it happens, and as a result it will turn into an advantage for the clan. Therefore we're not talking about betrayal.»

Ingenious rhetoric.

He probably intended to distract him messing with the theory, but Itachi hadn't been deceived. No matter the results for the clan, if he reported the contents of the meetings to Danzō, that was nothing but a betrayal.

Danzō was misjudging him.

Itachi didn't fuss over words like "betrayal".

«Understood.»

«I thought that you, who dislike conflicts more than anyone else, would say that.» the head of the Root answered in a voice that didn't express any feeling.

The annoying thing was that it was as Danzō said.

Itachi hadn't been able to find a concrete plan to avert the coup d'état before it happened. Danzō's proposal, which had been brought in a time like that, gave off a charm he couldn't resist to.

He could probably get The Third Hokage's cooperation by means of Shisui. Then maybe Itachi's determination would become the chance to use Danzō's power.

By being connected to the village's upper reaches, he'd surely avert an accidental discharge of the clan.

«I don't want to act to steal the clan's dignity. I'll leave the sifting of the information you'll bring me to you.»

«Thank you.»

«I trusted you, Itachi. The clan's destiny depends on your judgement.»

Danzō's voice weighted on his shoulders. Itachi's resolution wasn't light to the point of not being able to endure that weight.

He breathed in from the depths of his stomach, being aware of his own responsibility.

For some reason it smelled like blood...

Itachi's true story: Book of Dark Night

Chapter 5 – The stricken crow decides to deal with the death of his comrades

1

«As I thought, it turned out like this...» Kakashi muttered next to Itachi, who had lowered his breathing. A moment later, the figure of his captain who had his lower half of the face concealed by a dark mask disappeared.

He jumped the cliff, following him.

The corpses of their comrades were lying around the pit they were aiming at.

The enemies that had killed them were shinobi of a small country, the Land of Frost.

It was just when they were about to conclude an alliance.

The shinobi of the Land of Frost had suddenly bared their fangs in the middle of the mission in which they were exchanging the written documents, in which they had specified the final conditions for the alliance, which was about to reach a conclusion after ten days.

The enemy didn't wish for an alliance from the beginning.

The opponents were about ten against four Konoha shinobi.

They were outnumbered.

The Konoha shinobi, who had the duty of receiving the documents, had been killed in the twinkling of an eye.

Executing the extermination of the enemy as soon as the breakdown of the negotiations was clear.

That was the content of the mission Itachi and the other had received.

In short, they didn't move until the situation was clear. For this reason, the first move had been too late. As a result, all their friends had perished.

The moment when the shinobi of the Land of Frost had appeared in large number, ten, there was already the hint of a breakdown. If the Anbu had butted in at that point, maybe their friends wouldn't have died. However, even if Itachi had been in Kakashi's place, he probably wouldn't have moved until all four had perished.

Kakashi, who had gone first, landed among the enemies. His right hand had already pierced one enemy. The blue thunder that had gushed out was wrapping his captain's arm.

Chidori...

That technique was Kakashi's strongest point.

The moment his captain pulled out his arm, also Itachi landed in the middle of the enemies.

There were other two comrades of the Anbu.

One of them was Sogoru. The other one was a young shinobi named Tenzō. He was younger than Kakashi. However, his career as an Anbu was quite long.

«The Anbu of Konoha!»

The second after the enemy shouted, the trunk of a thick tree coiled around the man's neck and constricted him like a snake. Without even being able to oppose to that overwhelming strength, the man died with his long tongue hanging from his lips.

It was Tenzō's technique.

Tenzō was able to use Wood Release ninjutsu, which only the first Hokage, Hashirama, had been able to use.

«Konoha had no intention of concluding a treaty with us from the beginning.» another enemy told Kakashi.

«You're the ones who attacked us first.»

Without waiting for an objection, the Chidori gouged the enemy's chest.

Itachi heard a yell that sounded like a shriek coming from behind him.

The enemy, who had looked over his shoulder, faced him while raising his long sword above his head.

He turned around with his whole body.

The long sword was right above the crown of his head.

He quickly raised his right arm.

He grasped the enemy's right wrist, which was gripping the hilt.

«Ku!»

«Give up!» he told him, still clutching his wrist. Without even swinging the long sword downward, the enemy glowered at Itachi while cold sweat beaded him.

The Sharingan.

The enemy's body shivered violently, and lost all his strength.

The enemy's head, who was about to droop on the ground just like a puppet whose strings had been cut, flew in the air in front of Itachi's eyes.

A ninja sword sparkled behind the enemy.

It was Sugaru.

«*The mission from the Hokage-sama is the annihilation of the enemy.*» Sugaru whispered in a voice that only Itachi could hear.

He had read his secret intention of trying to knock him out putting him under a genjutsu of his Sharingan.

There was no need to annihilate the enemy. Whether a messenger returned or not, the current incident would be discovered in no time by the Land of Frost. If it was a revenge, only the men who had killed their four comrades should be enough. The efficacy of a restraint against the Land of Frost would probably be higher if they let them talk about Konoha's true strength by letting the others live.

«I understand.» Itachi said towards Sugaru's back, who was already trying to go towards another enemy, and he decided to aim towards his next target.

There were four enemies left.

They were losing their fighting spirit already.

Sugaru's ninja sword hurled towards the neck of a man who had collapsed in panic and was pleading for his life. A sharp branch, which had been created by Tenzō's Wood Release ninjutsu inside him, pierced the back of a kunoichi that was running away, trying to escape.

«With this, the Land of Frost and Konoha are mutual enemies!»

«Your lives will prevent that.» Kakashi muttered gently, and his arm pierced the enemy's solar plexus.

«Itachi.»

It was Tenzō's voice.

Itachi's eyes seized an enemy that was going towards him with the expression of someone ready to die. The enemy, who was grasping tightly some kunai in both his hands while gritting his teeth, looked younger than ten.

The Land of Frost was small. Although there weren't great conflicts, in an immature country both for the number of unskilled shinobi and their small national power probably even a ten-year-old boy like that one had become old enough for its military power.

«Haah!»

His fighting yell was no more than a weeping voice.

Itachi received the boy in his chest. A sharp pain ran through his stomach. The boy's kunai had stabbed him. Even if he had hit Itachi's stomach, both his slender arms were still trembling. His terror had crossed the limit, and tears began flowing from the boy's eyes.

«Itachi!» Kakashi yelled.

«I'm okay.» Itachi answered calmly, and Kakashi and the others stared at him surrounding him at a distance.

The boy's face, who was shaking, lifted slowly. His eyes, wet with tears, seized Itachi.

«W-whaa...»

His fear, turning into a voice, escaped from his mouth.

«You're already a full-fledged shinobi. Pull yourself together.»

He spoke to his enemy kindly. The boy, startled and surprised, didn't understand the reason. Shaking his head, he frantically tried to avert his eyes from the reality.

«You ran towards me without running away. That's why I want to accord you every courtesy as a full-fledged shinobi...»

He grabbed a kunai behind his back, so that the boy didn't see him. He ran the blade, pushing it from below through the nape of the enemy's neck, who kept on crying.

He softly pulled out the kunai from his stomach, and stepped back.

Blood splashed from the boy's neck.

He wasn't struck by the spurt of blood.

That was a shinobi knowledge as well.

Also his childish body rolled over the mountain of corpses that were neither enemies nor friends.

«This is a battlefield, too...» he muttered in a voice that nobody could hear.

Itachi had asked in his mind.

Was he really getting closer to his dream?

Buried by the time that flowed slowly, apparently his body was steadily getting heavier.

The time of his childhood when he wished with his whole heart to become a shinobi better than anybody else was already far away, and the bonds that coiled around him were trapping Itachi into the frame of "common shinobi".

Abandoning the village and the clan and the Anbu as they were, he wanted to become free...

He knew that it wasn't an allowed thing.

The boy's eyes, which had lost their radiance, were eternally staring at a troubled Itachi.

*

«A list of the number of participants of the plan when it's time to jump into action, the routes of invasions, the targets of attacks and assassinations. And I thought I want to decide the principal day of action in the next meeting. Before that, collect everyone's

opinion. If there are some ideas, you can say them at any time. However, take care to stand always on guard against the eyes of the people of the village.»

When his father's speech ended, his fellow clansmen relaxed their attention for an instant. They had relaxed assuming that the meeting was concluded. But everyone's mood was smashed by Yashiro's voice, who made them tense.

«Is there Itachi?»

At the voice that had called him, Itachi felt an inner feeling of disgust.

«Itachi.»

An irritated voice gave Itachi the final blow, who hadn't answered.

«I'm here.»

He raised his heavy waist. Without even rebuking Itachi's behaviour, Yashiro only cast him a cold-hearted glance.

«You too were in the place of the breakdown of the negotiations with the Land of Frost the other day, right?»

«...»

«Answer me.»

«The missions of the Anbu are not things I have to talk about with outsiders.»

«Are you talking seriously?»

Yashiro's eyebrows formed a deep crease. Itachi, without answering, just stared at the narrow eyes in front of his own.

«What did you join the Anbu for?»

«...»

«To get various information in a place near the core of the village, and to report them back to us!»

«Yashiro.»

Coming to his son's help, who had sunk into silence, his father called his trusted friend's name. Without trying to answer his father, Yashiro kept glaring at Itachi.

«What have you brought us since you entered in the Anbu? We haven't heard any secret of the village from your mouth, not even once.»

«I don't say anything just because I don't know anything.»

«Is that really so?»

«What do you mean?»

An intention of revolt flickered in Itachi's eyes. A man with long hair stood up next to Yashiro, who had reacted to that with a bold smile.

Uchiha Inabi.

He was a trusted friend of his father's, too.

«If you're betraying us...»

«Cut that out!» his father shouted.

At his father's unusual threatening attitude, Yashiro and Inabi sunk into silence.

«You too should know what kind of time it is now for the clan. We won't manage to achieve any important thing by quarrelling with our fellow comrades.»

«...»

Yashiro sat down, looking unsatisfied. Inabi sat down too, as if he had been attracted by him.

«Sit down too, Itachi.»

His father glared at him.

«Itachi...» his father whispered with a thin voice to his son, who kept standing. His voice sounded like a supplication.

«I'm sorry.»

The pain of his chest came out, turning spontaneously words.

His father was frantically bringing everyone together.

Why was he trying to settle things down peacefully, becoming so much servile? Was that frame called "clan" that much important for him? To Itachi, it seemed that his father was toyed with by the heat of young men.

He couldn't understand...

«Anyway, the next meeting will be about the decision of our course of action. It's an important meeting. Absence won't be allowed, so keep that in mind.»

The meeting ended still with a turbulent mood, and without meeting anyone's eyes Itachi got on his way back home alone.

He didn't even caught sight of Shisui's and Izumi's figure.

2

Danzō looked down towards Hiruzen, who was putting his lips on the mouthpiece of his pipe. They were in the Hokage Office. There was no one except the two of them.

«Half year since he joined the Anbu....» Hiruzen said breathing out the smoke.

«What do you mean?»

«Don't play dumb. I mean that man you set your eyes on.»

«Humph.»

Sometimes Hiruzen used an indirect way of talking like this.

«He's been completing missions diligently.»

«Really.»

«You didn't come here to talk about him?»

He had seen through him. Danzō, who hated having people peeking into his heart more than anyone else, couldn't stand that.

«Apparently you have a subordinate under your direct control in the Uchiha clan, Hiruzen.»

He made his counterattacking move. With an air as if he had been hit in a painful place, Hiruzen put his pipe on his mouth.

Danzō continued, unconcerned.

«You relieved Uchiha Shisui of normal missions, and gave him the authority of moving at his own discernment and discretion, didn't you? Moreover, even if it's in name only, you let another member of the Uchiha in the Anbu.»

«Shisui wished to be able to move freely. I only arranged his path for this reason.»

«So a person, no matter if he's the Hokage, granted the whim of a mere shinobi?»

«I had only considered the feelings of a guy that's anxious for the Uchiha clan.»

«The village doesn't maintain himself by considering each one's circumstances like you did.»

«Even if I said a thing like that to you, you wouldn't understand!» Hiruzen shouted, revealing his irritation.

«Quit that indirect way of speaking, why don't you say it directly? What the heck did you came here today for, Danzō?»

“Soon I’ll stop teasing you...” Danzō snickered in his mind, and he spoke of the matter he had been thinking lately.

«Just like you have someone under your control in the Uchiha clan, I want you to provide me with one person, too.»

The moment he said “under your control”, Hiruzen made an openly reluctant face. Then he heard until the end, and he looked at Danzō slightly lifting the corners of his mouth.

«Are you telling me to give Itachi to the “Root”?»

«I never thought a thing like that.»

«Don’t play dumb.»

«I’m not playing dumb.» Danzō declared, and Hiruzen narrowed his eyes to infer his real intentions. The countless wrinkles that ran at the corner of his eyes deepened.

«What are you thinking?»

«Why don’t you raise Itachi to the status of captain?»

«He’s only eleven.»

«The squad leaders of the Anbu are above thirteen... Surely there’s a rule like that.»

Danzō said with a faint smile, and Hiruzen made an expression of discomfort.

«The Anbu is a force that carries on its shoulders the core of the village. The captains that lead it have to possess enough power of discernment. So the requirement is turning thirteen.»

«Enough power of discernment... Itachi has got such thing already.»

«That’s not the problem.»

«Things like age are powerless before one’s true strength.»

At Danzō’s unyielding attitude, Hiruzen sank into silence.

«Are rules so important, Hiruzen? The Uchiha clan’s discontent is already a sticky situation. To break down this reality, you need a person who’s connected to you in a position in which he can use the will of the Root effectively. If he were a mere shinobi of the Anbu, he couldn’t escape from the commands of his captain. Raising Itachi to the status of captain means easing him.»

«Do you mean putting him in a place between me and you, without letting him into the “Root”?»

«That’s right. In the Uchiha clan, Itachi and Shisui aren’t people who have an equal power. If we drag those two here, it will be difficult to avert the clan’s accidental discharge. Just like you gave Shisui a special right, also Itachi needs some kind of authority.»

«But an eleven-year-old boy is too young for being a captain.»

Hiruzen hesitated.

Another push...

«How about twelve?»

The Third Hokage didn’t answer.

«Do you think you can deal enough with the rules by increasing Itachi’s official age of one year?»

«Let me think about it for a while.»

«Understood.»

Danzō was sure of it.

Hiruzen would surely consent.

*

«How was school?» Itachi asked his younger brother, who was sitting on a bench, and moistened his throat with a cool juice.

«Training with you, big brother, in this way, is way more useful.»

While he grasped tightly the can from which the water drops were oozing with both hands, Sasuke smiled looking up towards his older brother.

“Training with you, Shisui, is way more profitable...”

When he had just entered the Academy, Itachi had said the same things. Now he was experiencing personally that siblings were similar. He had finished his mission early, and when Sasuke came back home he had decided to keep in company in his training. Since they couldn't stay together too much, they actively created a chance to do it. Nowadays, that one hour he spent with Sasuke was more soothing than anything else for Itachi.

When he shed sweat with his younger brother, he could escape from his usual oppressiveness.

Since when it had become like this?

When he met face to face with Shisui, lately, they only talked about the clan's fate.

Training together was a thing of many years ago. Even if he talked with Izumi, he couldn't be free from obstructive thoughts and caring about the changes of her heart at the same time. He knew that he was fussing about it too much, but he couldn't help it.

In the end, only when he trained together with his younger brother he could be himself without thinking about anything.

«Is school boring?»

«It's not that, but...»

Sasuke faltered, staring at the opening of the can.

For some reason he understood what his brother was thinking.

«Since your talent and your way of thinking are so different, you don't get along well with your friends, right?»

Because also Itachi himself had been like that. He could do anything better than anybody else, so his peers and comrades looked awfully like children to him. Since their way of thinking and the way they faced everything was too childish, he couldn't even speak with them with an equal sense of values. He guessed that perhaps also Sasuke was like that.

He had a hunch that just like him, also his brother was partially bad at socialising.

«I don't think I'll get along with the others. After all, those guys are completely hopeless both at ninjutsu and study...»

«What about Naruto?»

«Eh?»

When that unexpected name came out of his older brother's mouth, Sasuke's eyes opened wide. His eyes, which were looking up towards Itachi, showed surprise.

Itachi himself was surprised. He himself didn't know why Naruto's name had come out of his mouth. However, for some reason the thought of that golden-haired boy the same age of his younger brother crossed his mind.

«That guy, he fails at everything, no matter what he does. Besides, one way or another, he always lashes out at me, he's a troublesome guy.»

«Naruto lashes out at you?»

«I don't care about him in particular, and yet he always picks on me.»

Itachi thought that if his younger brother's position in the school wasn't different from his own when he attended to school, the other students surrounded Sasuke at a distance.

In exchange for acknowledging Sasuke's true strength, nobody would become his best friend.

However, Naruto lashed out at Sasuke.

The figure of him boasting he'll become Hokage was brought back on his mind. A pathetic child with the Nine-Tails sealed in his body that nobody took seriously. And yet he didn't doubt in believing his big dream.

His appearance and his manner of speaking and everything seemed exactly opposite to his younger brother Sasuke.

But...

When he imagined the figure of those two one next to the other, they looked strangely good.

«The fact that he lashes out at you means that he cares about you. Make friends with him.»

«I can't make friends with a guy like that.»

«It'd be nice if you'll be able, one day.» he said, and put his palm on his younger brother's head.

«That's absolutely impossible!»

Sasuke closed his eyes firmly, wrinkled his nose, and gritted his teeth. At his comical expression, Itachi laughed instinctively.

Also his younger brother began laughing, loosening his expression.

That evening full of warmth passed calmly.

3

Fugaku, who had closed his eyes as he was sitting with his arms folded, opened his eyelids hearing the sound of the paper sliding door opening.

He was in his room.

He was sitting cross-legged while looking at the alcove on his right that had been equipped with a chief seat, giving his back to the right wall of his room. The one who had opened the paper door that looked out on the corridor and showed his face was his own son.

«What is it, father?» his too excellent son said without even smoothing his tone, which had become awfully cold in that occasion, and didn't enter into the room.

«Come in.»

When Fugaku invited him, he dawdled on the threshold with a feeling of reluctance.

Closing the paper door behind him, his son sat in front of his father.

«Looks like you went to the park with Sasuke.»

«Yes.»

He had made sure that those two had come back home covered in sweat, and had summoned him as he had just come out of the bath. The younger brother was now talking with his mother by the dining table.

«I'm getting ready for tomorrow's mission. There are things I have to prepare, so be brief please.» his son, who had said this stiffening his face, was clearly on guard against his father.

It was understandable.

They hadn't had a conversation worthy of that name in this place, and the chance to listening to each other's voice was only during a meeting. He couldn't show his face of

parent with everyone's eyes filed upon him. If he only behaved formally, it was natural that the distance between them would open.

«Don't use such a stiff tone.» Fugaku said, showing a smile.

It was the best smiling face he could manage.

Usually, Fugaku seldom smiled. As the captain of the Military Police Force, as the person that unified the young people of the clan, he thought that he shouldn't let his emotions out without reason.

No...

If he thought about it, he had never smiled very much since he was a child.

Come to think of it, when was it that he saw his son's smiling face?

He didn't remember.

He and his son were similar...

A strange pleasure surged in his chest.

The pure pleasure as a parent that his son had taken after him was different from the pleasure Fugaku was feeling now.

He had been called the most talented of the whole Academy, he had taken part to the Chūnin Exams alone, he was the first Uchiha that had been assumed in the Anbu.

He was pleased for the fact that a shinobi who had created so many legends was similar to him. He had the distorted feeling, as a father, that he was looking at his son as the subject of his admiration in some respects. And Fugaku himself was well aware of this feeling. That's why sometimes Fugaku was annoyed by his son.

Not as father, but as a man, he couldn't acknowledge the truth that he was inferior to him, no matter what. That's why he unintentionally adopted a rude behaviour towards Itachi.

He thought that this behaviour was too foolish for a parent. However, Fugaku's pride as a shinobi couldn't be honestly glad about Itachi's success in life.

Then, his son was trying to get out of his hands...

«How's your work in the Anbu going?» his father asked without breaking his smiling face, and Itachi stared at him with guarding eyes.

«If I put into practice the things I accumulated everyday since I graduated from the Academy, it's nothing special.»

It was an overly exemplary answer. It looked like that his son, who had replied simply, was a boss receiving the person that controlled the clan's young people, rather than his father.

«There aren't Yashiro and Inabi and the others here.»

He was talking with a tone as soft as possible.

He continued.

«I'm your father, and you're my son. It's just you and me in this room.»

He was a smart child. Apparently he had quickly understood his father's thoughts while he only said that much. Nevertheless, he hadn't changed his obedient attitude of when he was only five, six years old. Somehow, he had dissolved his alertness. He had loosened his heart only that much. But Itachi's eyes had become extremely gentler than before.

«Nothing in particular has changed from when I wasn't an Anbu.»

«Don't you do hard tasks?»

«Of course there are...»

At that point, Itachi faltered.

Then he lowered his eyes for a moment, and he stared towards his father again.

«Since I joined the Anbu, I hadn't allowed myself to depend on other people.»

«As I expected from my child.»

His favourite phrase...

When he praised his son he always spat out those words. But he felt that he overstretched himself when he used those words. He tried to bind his son, who was a genius, with those words, "my child", as if he was pressing him down in his own category.

He felt like he was doing it.

He had already used his favourite phrase. When he thought that he wanted to praise his son, those words had come out faster than his thoughts. That's why after he said "As I expected from my child", a small sharp thorn stabbed his chest. Then also today, Fugaku felt a pain in his chest.

He spat out some words as to shake off the uneasiness that was somewhere in his stomach.

«Don't worry about the meeting.»

«Eh?»

At his father's words, his son gave him a surprised look. Maybe he had expected to be rebuked for the exchange with Yashiro and the others at the meeting. As a result of this unexpected turn, Itachi was perplexed.

«It's not that all the people of the clan have the same opinions. I have no intention of forcing our opinions. I think you want to be a man similar to a rock that persists even if it's against the current, rather than a being similar to a stone that is driven away by the strong current.»

«Father...»

«You don't have to yield your opinion. If you can't agree with what Yashiro and the others say, you can stick to your opinion fair and square.»

«But those meeting have an atmosphere that doesn't allow that.»

A spontaneous sigh escaped from Fugaku's mouth.

«Of course, it's as you say. Young people are moved by their enthusiasm, and they lose sight of themselves. Then, they try pushing their way through the things they believe to be their righteous opinion, even excluding people who don't agree with them.»

«Father...»

Itachi faltered.

«What? Get to the point.»

«Yes.»

His son began talking, as if he had made up his mind.

«Father, is your opinion different from the others'?»

«It isn't.» he asserted.

«Even I feel the same as them. It's just that I'm not young to the point of being able to exclude different opinions.»

His son disappointment was so evident that he could almost touch it.

«Is that so...»

The stone had already begun to roll. Now, there was nothing he could do. No, he had no intention of doing it.

Jumping into action was the only possibility left for the clan.

But...

He didn't want to make his son obey against his will.

«It's okay if you are true to your own opinions. You search for an answer wavering, wavering, wavering completely. Then, when you find an answer, don't be perplexed on what you've decided. Find an answer, and have the resolution of sticking to it. This is "decision".»

«Decision...»

«Right. In this world, there are few people that live while making their own decisions in their lives. All of them live while entrusting their decisions to others and turning away their eyes from their responsibility. Don't ever live in that way. Live your life making your own decisions.»

Fugaku felt something hot inside his eyes. He was frantically trying to suppress the excitement in his chest so that his son could understand that.

«I understand.»

Letting out a small breath, Itachi gave his father a warm look.

«I won't leave the decisions of my life to anyone.»

«As expected from my child.»

Fugaku said these words honestly after a long time.

His chest didn't ache anymore.

*

Danzō hadn't missed that Hiruzen's eyebrows had trembled a little.

They were in the upper conference room of the Hokage residence.

It was the place where the plan of the budget related to the Village of the Hidden Leaf's administration was decided. Besides Hiruzen and Danzō, there were the figures of the Honourable Councillors Koharu and Homura. In this meeting they'd decide a fundamental plan of action, and basing on that Hiruzen would chose the people in charge of the administration of the village and an official budget.

«This is the budget for the Military Police Force, but...»

Raising his eyes from the documents he was holding, Hiruzen looked at the other three people. The thing he was holding in his hands was a written proposal from Danzō and the others.

«You're suggesting a drastic reduction of the budget, what does it mean Koharu?»

Koharu, who was dozing when her name was called, looked at Hiruzen opening her narrow eyes slightly.

«Already seven years has passed since the end of the hostilities. Also the village's public order has settled down a lot. In addition, it became a habit to mobilise the Anbu for the investigation of the principal and most atrocious criminals. Currently, the role of the Military Police Force is limited. They don't need a budget like the one they had so far, do they?»

«Nevertheless, a sudden reduction of the forty percent is too abrupt. It will have some effects on the members of the Military Police Force.»

While examining Hiruzen's face, which looked like he had swallowed a bitten bug, Mitokado Homura opened his mouth.

«The reconstruction after the Nine-Tails attack is almost over, and the construction of a new facility and the construction of a wide road became an urgent business. Also the Academy, which abolished the accelerated graduation program, has to be enlarged soon. We can't afford to spare money for an institution that is inclined to a reduction.»

«I understand this. I understand, but using this method will turn the Military Police Force into an enemy, more and more...»

«It will urge their dissatisfaction. Right?»

Danzō had spat out these words. He was waiting for an adequate chance, and made his move. He continued.

«In this case, I ask: are there other duty posts that are obviously as inclined as the Military Police Force to a reduction of professional duties in this village? An expansion of the Anbu's professional duties with the public order of the village. Also the cause of the reduction is clear. The Military Police Force has no other role except the maintenance of the public order. Then currently it's suspicious if they're performing even that loyally or not, because of the ill feeling of dissatisfaction towards the village. Don't you think that by ensuring them the present budget you're only pampering them?»

«I'm not pampering them. I'm protecting them.»

«Protecting? Why do you need to protect people who have no kind of obstacle at work?»

«Because of people like you who have prejudice on their clan, because the place where they can play an active role is limited!»

Hiruzen stood up, hitting the desk. Homura and Koharu stared calmly at him.

Without suppressing the smile on his lips, Danzō spat out some words towards the Third, with whom he had an old friendship.

«You're protecting them because I have prejudices... Doesn't this behaviour discriminate them, isolating them?»

«What did you say...»

«Since there's the position of Military Police Force and its budget is guaranteed more than enough by the village, the people of the Uchiha clan reject the contact with the outsiders, and act sneakily only with the insiders. With the pretence of protecting them you're isolating them inside the frame of the Military Police Force, so it's possible that they're cultivating the evil sprout of dissatisfaction within their bodies, right?»

«The foundation and administration of the Military Police Force are the dying wish of the late Second.»

«Don't you think that this way of thinking is antiquated? Now that the scars of the end of the Great War and the Nine-Tails attack are now beginning to heal, I think we need a change, but what are everyone's opinion?»

«No objection.» Koharu expressed her agreement. Also Homura nodded silently in assent. He had already got through with the necessary arrangements towards those two. Three people had greed on the cut of budget of the Military Police Force. Only Hiruzen was left.

«What will we do if the Uchiha clan's dissent bursts accidentally?»

«You're using Shisui to prevent it before it happens, right?»

Danzō played his trump card.

Hit on a painful spot, Hiruzen faltered.

«You removed a young shinobi who was anxious for his clan from the normal missions, you gave him a position on paper, you even gave him the authority of confiding in his own judgement to some extent, wasn't it for this reason?»

«The thirty percent...» Hiruzen said in a husky voice.

The option of mortification.

He was acting as planned. Even Danzō didn't think that a reduction of the forty percent was actually possible. He had expected that the thirty percent was valid line of action. «If we cut their budget more than the thirty percent, we won't be able to avoid a rebellion of the Military Police Force.»

«I show my respect to the Hokage's decision.»

At Danzō's affected words, Hiruzen made a blatantly unpleasant face.

4

He had been called by Shisui at the usual cliff.

It was already midnight. Both the village and the district were asleep. However, the eyes of the Anbu that were watching the district were wide awake.

During his mission of guarding the clan, he had memorised all the angles of view of the surveillance cameras. Using the slight interval that was created in the angle between the cameras, he had already worked out a route to move freely through the district.

He had only told Shisui about the surveillance of the Anbu and the route of blind spots.

Shisui was the only shinobi he could trust. He'd never reveal this thing to other people.

Also Shisui had to get to the cliff following the route of blind spots.

Nobody knew about their meeting.

Itachi left the district, evaded the eyes of the surveillance cameras and ran. The moon's last quarter gleamed almost at the zenith. Under the stars that twinkled as if they were about to fall, he was nothing but run choosing the darkness.

Suddenly the wood opened, and the cliff of his intention appeared.

On the point of the desolate rock, there was a human figure. The one who was standing there showing him his back was looking at the flow of the large river that could be seen below the cliff. Itachi immediately rushed towards him, and stopped his feet behind him.

«I made you wait.»

«I just came here, too.» Shisui said turning around, and his face was clearly emaciated. A slight shadow had appeared below his eyes, and also his cheeks were slightly thin.

His chin, which was somehow pointy in the old days, showed more traces of overwork than an adult's.

«You look extremely tired.»

«That's because of various reasons...»

A shadow that he couldn't hide was clinging on Shisui's face, who had cast his eyes down. Sympathising with his best friend, Itachi said in a quiet voice: «Even if I said I'd move together with you, I left everything to you, I'm sorry.»

«You couldn't neglect your missions. I'm a member of the Anbu as well, but I've been allowed by the Hokage-sama to move freely. It's natural that I'm working. You don't have to worry about me.»

His friend had told him so, but Itachi fully realised his own cowardice. While they had the common intention of prevent a clan's coup d'état before it happened, what the heck had he done? Shisui had obtained the authority of acting at his own discernment to investigate on the clan's intrigue, and investigated the clan's movements day and night. Unlike him, who had been swamped with everyday missions and had postponed the matter of the clan.

And yet Shisui treated Itachi as a comrade. That's why even now he had met him outside the village, evading the eyes of the surveillance like this.

«When we get down to business, there's something I want to tell you.»

Shisui's gaze, who had broke the ice, was abnormally sharp.

«You're being suspected by the clan.»

«I knew even if you didn't tell me that.»

«A shinobi of the clan has been ordered to guard you.»

«What...»

The clan spied Itachi. Moreover, Shisui said that it was a shinobi of the clan itself the one who had been assigned to this duty.

Who, in the clan, had the authority of handing down orders to his fellow clansmen?

His father.

«Don't tell me that such thing...»

«It's true, Itachi. I have no doubt because I witnessed that.»

«What do you mean?»

«I mean that I am the person who has been assigned to spy you.»

Shisui's words pierced his chest.

His father had ordered Shisui to spy him?

«Using the fact that I'm your friend, three high officers of the Military Police Force have ordered me to guard you.» Shisui said, answering the voice in Itachi's mind.

Three high officers...

«Yashiro, Inabi, Tekka. Those guys suspect you. Because you and Yashiro have practically argued violently during the meeting.»

Shisui was implicitly telling him that it wasn't his father.

But his father was in a position in which he could give orders to those three. Even if Yashiro and the others had ordered Shisui, it wasn't clear how far the origin of this order was. A dark suspicious, completely different from the feeling of love he felt towards his father's previous kind words, surged in Itachi's chest.

Who the hell was his father really?

«There's no need to say such thing, but relax, because I'll report the information about you manipulating the facts properly.»

He had no doubts about Shisui.

«But the radical party will surely keep an eye on you.»

«I'm prepared for it.»

«This firmness is your virtue and weakness.» Shisui said, laughing.

«That's what I like about you.»

His friend's eyes, who had looked up to the sky, watched the moon that floated in the dark night.

«You have the strength of never yielding your way of thinking, no matter what happens.

As long as it's to carry out your intentions, no matter how strong is the power in front of you, you fight against it without hesitating. That's why I trust you. And...»

Averting his eyes from the waning moon, and when he thought he had cast his eyes down, Shisui looked straight towards Itachi.

«I can tell you my decision frankly.»

«What's the matter, Shisui?»

«Do you know what day is tomorrow?»

Itachi nodded silently.

There was a meeting of the clan.

The last time, his father had said that this meeting's main issue would be deciding the day in which they'd carry out the coup d'état. In short, in tomorrow's meeting the consensus of the clan would be confirmed, and their intention of jumping into action would be strengthened.

«If tomorrow's meeting takes place as usual, we won't be able to stop them anymore.»

«What do you intend to do?»

«I think I'll attack your father on his way to the Naka shrine.»

Itachi couldn't stop his heartbeat from increasing.

«Relax, I won't kill Fugaku-sama. I'll only put him under a genjutsu.»

«That Sharingan you used that time with Mukai?»

«Exactly.»

Shisui's eyes sparkled crimson in the darkness. Then the three commas pattern that had risen on its surface got bigger.

«The Mangekyō Sharingan.»

After that, also Itachi examined those eyes.

The existence of the Mangekyō Sharingan was told only in old documents of the Uchiha, and this power was recorded with the description that it surpassed a normal Sharingan by far. It was written that the people who practically awakened it were a handful, and a lot of ocular techniques of that field were unknown even for the clan.

«In the case of these eyes, he won't be able to defend against them, even if he's Fugaku-sama feared as "The Evil Eyes".»

«Supposing you put him under a genjutsu, what does it do in practice?»

«When I awakened these eyes, at the same time I mastered a technique. A technique named "Kotoamatsukami".»

«Kotoamatsukami...»

At the sound of the words he himself had said, Itachi felt an indescribable ghostly feeling.

«In the condition in which an opponent that has been put under the genjutsu loses completely his self-awareness, I can manipulate him at will.»

Itachi knew that basically something like an ocular technique was basically like that.

The presence or absence of the self-awareness of a target was decided by the intentions of the shinobi that makes the operation. It's one of the two: either he makes the opponent fall into a circle of suspicions by suggesting the self-awareness to the target that he's been put under a technique, and puts him under the technique in this way, or he gradually puts him under a technique without him being aware of it, and it can't be helped when the opponent notices it.

The Kotoamatsukami falls under the case in which the target doesn't realise it.

It wasn't especially strange for an ocular technique.

«The strong point of this technique is in the time of putting it into operation and the effects of the technique, which are amplified by the strength of the Mangekyō Sharingan.» Shisui added. Itachi kept staring silently at the fantastic Sharingan of his friend, urging him to explain.

«An ocular technique of a normal Sharingan requires the direct act of pouring an amount chakra when your eyes and your target's meet. But with the Mangekyō Sharingan it's possible to eliminate this process. You can pour your chakra only by looking into the opponent's eyes, even if your eyes don't make contact with his. Moreover, its quantity is

many times more than when you use the Sharingan. For this reason the target falls into its ocular technique in an instant, and he doesn't understand it, no matter what happens.»

«Do you mean that the moment the enemy sees you, he's already under your jutsu?»

«Exactly.»

«Will you use that with my father?»

Shisui nodded firmly.

«If only I put him under the Kotoamatsukami, I'll be able to tell everyone to stop the coup d'état with Fugaku-sama's mouth. Moreover, in his condition Fugaku-sama himself will be able to think that those are his thoughts coming from the depths of his heart.»

«Do you mean that you'll rewrite the mind of the ringleader?»

«The only thing that makes me hesitate is the fact that he's your father.»

«Don't worry about a thing like that.» Itachi said. As long as it's to stop the coup d'état, Itachi would do it with pleasure, even if he acted to correct his father's heart. Only Shisui could put it into practice, though.

«Don't come to tomorrow's meeting, Itachi.»

«Why?»

«You've been suspected by the guys of the radical faction. If Fugaku-sama suddenly changes his behaviour, you'll be the first to be suspected. If you don't happen to be present in the place of the meeting, those guys won't know what to do.»

«Do you mean that they'd attack me?»

That may be all right, Itachi thought. He had learned during the years since he'd become a shinobi that sometimes a small battle can't be avoided, to avoid a bigger battle. To erase all the conflicts from this world, a precious sacrifice was needed.

«If it means that they'll attack, I'll just reject them.»

«Yashiro and the others are no match for you. But we have to prevent the fact that they'd cancel that important meeting because of a skirmish.»

«I believe that as stubborn as they are they'll make the meeting change suddenly as they made my father change.»

«Yeah.»

Shisui grabbed Itachi's shoulders.

«If everything goes well, the clan's zeal for a coup d'état will weaken. I'll defeat Fugaku-sama, and I'll gradually increase the anti-war comrades in the clan as a start.»

«Isn't there anything I can do?»

«Wait here 'till the end of the meeting.»

«But»

«I'll surely make it.»

Shisui showed him a strong smile.

«I'll come here to tell you what happened in the meeting. Wait until then. The next time we'll meet, it will be when the clan will take a step forward toward peace. After that, I'll need you power. A person like you that transcends the ability of the clan will become surely important later. Until then, your role is not dying, no matter what happens. For this reason, leave tomorrow to me. I beg you.»

His friend bowed his head very deeply.

«I'm sorry I won't be able to help you at an important time like that.» Itachi said, and bowed his head as well.

The grip of his friend's hands on his shoulders became very strong.

«Itachi... from tomorrow, our battle will begin.»
«I was ready for it a long time ago.»

5

«What? You know what day is tomorrow!!»

His father's loud voice resounded through the house in the dead of night.

The feeling that Itachi was bearing at the beginning wasn't fear towards his father, nor concern for his rage.

Wouldn't his younger brother wake up with his loud voice? That was a foolish thing.

His younger brother would have school tomorrow. Without knowing the turbulent shadow that wrapped the clan, he lived for his own everyday diligence. He didn't want to disturb his precious sleep that would maintain his brother's strength to face tomorrow with his inelegant angry voice.

They were in his father's room.

Both his parents were sitting in front of Itachi. Also his mother was sitting next to his father, who was glaring at his son with his arms crossed, and had curved her mouth down at the corners raising her thin eyebrows. Looking at her figure, Itachi realised for the first time that his mother, too, had the same feeling of his father.

He had never talked with his mother about the suspicions of the clan and the contents of the meetings. Also his mother had never asked him anything, and had never spoke for Itachi. Moreover, his mother didn't know in what mental state he has been seeing the clan so far, because she had no choice but talk with his father like this, in front of Itachi.

But in a second he realised everything.

His mother, who was sitting next to his father revealing her anger, was a member of the clan that agreed with the coup d'état.

Thinking back now, it was natural.

She wasn't the kind of wife that would voice an opinion different from the plan in which her own husband was the ringleader. Even if he inferred it from his mother's calm disposition, she wasn't a person that could go against his father's will.

This is what he understood.

But even if he understood that, when she actually showed it in front of his eyes like that, it was a big shock in itself.

Itachi confronted his father, making his best not to look towards his mother.

A presence flickered at the opposite side of the paper sliding door behind him.

Sasuke...

As he thought, his father's loud voice had awakened him.

A flame of anger surged in Itachi's heart.

His father had not enough consideration towards his younger brother.

Like the day of his entrance ceremony, when he had tried to join Itachi's mission, forgetting completely about Sasuke, like this time with his angry voice. Even when he looked at his brother's report cards, which had nothing but full scores, he hadn't even said anything important. When he had heard from his mother that Sasuke had been disappointed for that, Itachi couldn't help but feel sad for his brother.

Later, Sasuke began harbouring a complex feeling towards his older brother.

Having the wrong guess that his father saw nothing but his older brother, it seemed that a slight feeling of envy had bud in him.

He wanted to scream before his younger brother that he had misunderstood. His father didn't see Itachi as a son. Itachi was as a useful tool he needed for his own ambition of the coup d'état.

The relationship between him and his father wasn't decided with the relationship his younger brother thought. Actually, what was Itachi been yelled at for? It wasn't because he was disobeying his father as a son, it wasn't even because he was behaving wrongly as a person. His father was angry only for the point that he won't take part to the most important meeting for his ambition.

Brushing his father's disgust aside, Itachi opened his mouth, making up his mind.

«...tomorrow, I'll start a mission.»

«...what kind of mission!!»

That stupid question made Itachi feel exhausted. His father should have know that he had a duty of confidentiality for the missions of the Anbu. It wasn't a thing for which he could simply answer just because he asked it.

«...I can't tell you that... it's an absolutely secret mission.»

As he answered, his irritation became stronger.

He was furious not only because he had made him a stupid question, but also for his father and mother's foolishness, who hadn't noticed his brother's presence because they were too involved in the conversation in front of their eyes.

His father, who had heard the single word that it was a secret mission, closed his eyes with his arms still crossed. He sank into silence, closing even more strongly his perpetually narrowed lips. His mother examined his figure, who was making his nervousness gush out from his whole body, looking worried.

Sweat was slightly blotting their faces.

An unbearable silence was filling the room. Wondering if Sasuke wouldn't collapse because he couldn't stand this overly tense atmosphere, Itachi converged his senses on the presence behind him.

«Itachi...»

Hi father called his son's name. Then he began talking without pausing.

«You are the mediator that connects the clan and the highest spheres of the village...»

His father's eyes became slightly red, but they didn't changed to the point that the pattern of the Sharingan rose to their surface.

The mediator that connects the clan and the highest spheres of the village...

The main point was that he was a spy. Itachi asked his father within his mind if now he had to reconfirm that, since ha had forced the role of villain to his son.

Naturally he hadn't received an answer, only his father's sharp gaze pierced Itachi's heart, which was hurt and torn out.

«This... do you understand this?»

«Yeah...»

It was all he managed to answer.

If he acted so that Yashiro and the other young people of the clan would be happy, as his father wished, what in the world would the village do?

A surveillance 24/7 of the clan by the Anbu.

The request of provision of information of the clan from Danzō.

Only that was more than enough material to enrage his father and the others.

The project that had already gone as far as the stage of the decision of a concrete day of the coup d'état speeded up, and the young people's resentment towards the village had reached its peak.

What would come after that?

A war.

Then...

With a defeat of the Uchiha clan, there would be a persecution even more than now. Itachi knew more than enough in his shinobi life so far that the Village of the Hidden Leaf has never been a clean and pure village. There wasn't only the discrimination towards the Uchiha clan. They had sealed the Nine-Tails in a newborn child, and they had isolated him surrounding him at a distance without even letting him know the truth. Also the Anbu. The Hokage organised an institution that carried the darkness of the village on its shoulders, and let it take over shady tasks single-handedly.

In this way this village pushed into someone the things he didn't want to see and pretended he didn't see them. Could a clan that was defeated at the end of a coup d'état by a village like that even keep on living like it was used to?

No.

The path his father and the others were about to walk was a path to destruction.

His father's voice broke Itachi's train of thoughts.

«Keep that in mind.»

What did he mean with "that"? Itachi, who was floating in a sea of thoughts, for an instant missed his father's words. Then he remembered that his father's words were related to the single words "mediator that connects the clan and the highest spheres of the village".

His father continued.

«Then, come to tomorrow's meeting.»

«...»

It was impossible for him to come.

He had promised Shisui.

Nevertheless, he didn't dare to declare here "I won't come". If he did so, his father would get even more enraged. And if it happened, his speech would become much longer.

Sitting in front of his father was already his limit.

Sorry Sasuke...

He apologised inside his mind to his younger brother.

Turning away his gaze from his father, he turned his eyes towards the presence behind him.

«...Sasuke. If you went to the toilet, go to bed quickly.»

Only in that moment, his father and his mother noticed his younger brother's presence.

The paper sliding doors opened slightly behind Itachi, and Sasuke showed his face apologetically.

«Y-yeah.»

His father looked at Sasuke, standing up. Itachi wasn't seized by his field of vision already.

«What are you loitering for this late at night. Go to bed, quickly!»

His father spat out those words with a voice similar to a rebuke.

The anger that oozed out of his father's words wasn't purely against his younger brother who had woken up in the middle of the night. It was more the anger of having interrupted an important conversation.

No, it was only that.

«...yes.» Sasuke answered simply, looking desolate, maybe because he had quickly understood his father's mental state.

His brother's face, who had hung his head, lifted towards Itachi.

His eyes looked as if he was accusing him of something...

What in the world was his brother accusing him of?

Was it because he had revealed his presence?

Or was he thinking that his older brother was the cause that made his father be in that mental state?

Was the reason that he was jealous of his older brother, who monopolised his father and mother?

In Sasuke's gaze, which were filled with a lot of feelings, there was a depth in which he couldn't read its true meaning. Even if he had used the Sharingan, he would have succumbed to the impulse of wanting to understand his younger brother's heart, but it wouldn't have changed the reality.

There was only one thought in Itachi's brain. It was only a feeling of atonement towards the fact that he had used his younger brother to interrupt his conversation with his father.

6

Seeing the young man standing in front of his eyes, Danzō thought that there was not enough darkness in him.

His object of comparison was a shinobi from his same clan... Itachi.

«I hear that there's a meeting tomorrow at the Naka shrine?»

«In your case, who live in the darkness of the village, it's not strange that you know...

Although I think so, it's also true that I'm the one who's dumbfounded by the fact that the secrets of the clan are known to this extent.»

«This is the reality of the village.»

«Does it mean that we're made to swim in it?»

«You're really quick-witted, Uchiha Shisui.»

Danzō called the name of the man standing in front of him.

They were in front of the gate of residence of the Root.

There was no one else besides the two of them.

«There's one thing I want to ask to a quick-witted shinobi like you.»

«Since there's no much time left, be short...»

«Because it'd be bad if you lost your chance to attack Fugaku.»

A crease formed between Shisui's eyebrows.

«To this extent...»

«Don't misunderstand. It's not that I heard it from Hiruzen's mouth. Much less, it's not that Itachi revealed that to me. It's the result of the research of the people in my hands.»

A drop of sweat streamed down the smart young man's forehead.

«I can't say that manipulating Fugaku with your ocular technique and bring to an end the plan of the coup d'état is a good plan.»

Danzō looked at the young shinobi while putting his hand on his chin.

«Most part of the clan is already inclined towards carrying out the coup d'état. If Fugaku, the ringleader, turned against it, he would just add fuel to the fire.»

«If we don't give it a try...»

«I've made it through a great war two times, I can assure you. Your plan will fail.»

These solemn words sealed Shisui's mouth.

«Even if you succeeded in control Fugaku with your ocular technique and you used a temporary measure proposing a suspension at today's meeting, nothing will change. The radical party would only thing that Fugaku had changed his mind because he grew old and coward. Then they'll immediately chose another leader, and they'll put into practice the next stage of the plan. Listen, Shisui...»

Putting strength on his left eye, he looked straight through his limpid eyes.

«You can always replace a leader.»

«Don't talk as if it already happened!»

The young man's pure rage looked nothing but a tantrum to Danzō.

«This Mangekyō Sharingan... I'd be able to use it more effectively than you.»

«No»

Shisui jumped back and tried to measure the distance between them

But...

Only when his feet didn't move at his will, Shisui understood.

«Bugs are interesting animals.» he said while taking a step forward.

«When a person is stung by a mosquito, he doesn't feel the pain, much less of having been stung. He becomes itchy only after it flew away...»

He drew near Shisui with another step.

«The poison of scorpions and spiders sometimes leads even huge animals to death...»

«W-what did you do?»

«If we assume that there's a bug that has a poison equal to the one of a scorpion in its stinger, and it stings like a mosquito, it'd be intolerable for humans...»

Suddenly the landscape behind Shisui flickered, and a man appeared.

He was wearing a White Tiger mask.

Shisui's face, who was trembling all over, revolved slowly, and looked at the man over his shoulder. Danzō ignored him, and spat some words to the man in the White Tiger mask.

«What was your name now?»

«*It's Sugaru.*»

«Is that so...»

With other few steps he closed the distance between him and Shisui.

Danzō walked without hesitation.

«This man is from the Aburame clan. Since you're so smart, if I tell you this there's no need to explain further.»

«Ku...»

When he tried to move his body somehow, Shisui clenched his teeth. His brave figure was so pitiable that Danzō's lips crooked in a spontaneous smile.

«Relax, it's not a poison for which you die immediately. There will be enough time left to pull out both those eyes of yours.»

He was already at Shisui's distance. If he stretched his hand, he'd touch his face.

«Because you'll soon adapt, they're more fresh when you pluck them off while you're alive, rather than extracting them from a corpse.»

«Danzō... what are you...»

«This.»

As he said it, he extended his left arm.

Digging his index and middle finger, and then his thumb, he touched Shisui's right eye. He pushed his upper eyelid with his index and middle finger, and pushed his lower eyelid with the thumb. His eyes, which were glittering slimily, were gradually exposed. Without a hint of hesitation, he thrust his fingers into his eye socket.

He felt a warm sensation of his eyeball in his palm.

Finally he had obtained the Mangekyō Sharingan...

A great joy made Danzō's heart dance.

«Now, the other one.»

It was the moment he muttered this.

When he thought that Shisui's left eye was sparkling slightly, he suddenly disappeared from his eyes.

«*Body-Flicker*...» Sugaru muttered.

«Quick, follow him!»

The moment Danzō roared, Sugaru jumped. Also his subordinates, who were waiting for orders all around him, erased their presence.

«You mustn't let that guy live...»

The one who would fulfil Danzō's longstanding desire to the end was Itachi. Shisui was nothing but a hindrance. Unless he had a thing beyond his means like the Mangekyō Sharingan, Danzō wouldn't be able to do it personally.

«Kill him... kill him without fail.»

His voice didn't arrive to his subordinates, who had already erased their sound. However, Danzō couldn't help but ordering them anyway.

*

No matter the outcome, Shisui would come here.

Standing on the cliff of the appointment, Itachi was waiting alone for his friend's arrival. The sun was beginning to set at west, and the night would approach very soon. Only a little while until the beginning of the meeting. Shisui was supposed to control his father's thoughts with the power of the Mangekyō Sharingan right now. Even if the meeting had been short, there were two hours left. There was still time. Meanwhile, Itachi intended on thinking about the things happened so far.

While they had the common intention of preventing a coup d'état for the peace of the village, until now he had always left the concrete action to Shisui alone. Obtaining the Third Hokage's permission, he had investigated the clan's moves by himself, and had thought the current plan. It was all Shisui's doing. Itachi had nothing to do with it. Shisui said that everything would be decided after he turned his father in a position against the coup d'état. It didn't look like the hot-blooded young people of the clan would change their attitude with his father's change of heart. With a slight commotion, probably it would result in a delay of the time of the execution of the plan, but even if they had adjusted their attitude and explored a different path, they would carry out the coup d'état. What would they do after they dismissed his father?

That was the most needed plan to achieve their will. That's why he only had to rely on Shisui for the time being. Itachi himself would think about that. He thought that only after that he'd be on an equal footing with Shisui.

«!»

Suddenly he felt a presence behind him, and turned around.

«Shisui...» Itachi said in a blank daze for his friend's early arrival. Blood had streamed down his cheek from Shisui's closed right eyelid, and had dried.

«I'm sorry, Itachi.»

His friend came forward with unsteady steps, and stood in the point of the cliff surpassing Itachi. It was clear that something bad had happened. His friend had showed up to tell him. Itachi just waited in silence.

«I failed.»

«What happened to your right eye?»

Shisui didn't answer. He was staring at the cliff silently. In front of his friend, who wasn't continuing his story, Itachi desperately calmed down his agitated heart.

«I couldn't even come in contact with Fugaku-sama. The meeting has probably begun now. Maybe the essentials of the coup d'état will solidify in today's meeting. Our plan failed.»

«It doesn't mean that it's already over.»

His friend's heart was broken...

«Who did that?»

«Danzō.»

His heart roared violently. Then, that wily man's face was brought back into his mind.

«There's a man among that man's subordinated that uses bugs, right?»

«Perhaps he was wearing a White Tiger mask, wasn't he?»

«I was poisoned by that guy. I can't be saved anymore.»

It was Sugaru. That man was from the Aburame clan.

He used bugs.

«Itachi»

Shisui's voice was so weak that it surprised him. His friend, who was standing in front of his eyes, looked smaller than all the other times he had met him until now. The presence of death was following close behind that man, who was just like an older brother to him, and had always kept running in front of Itachi so far, and was fighting with him for the clan's sake.

«Now... it's extremely unlikely that the coup d'état will be stopped. If Konoha caused a civil war, the other countries would certainly invade it. ...first of all, it would become a war.»

It's extremely unlikely that the coup d'état will be stopped....

Those were words that he didn't want to hear from Shisui's mouth.

Was his friend giving up everything? Did death make people fragile to that point? Itachi, who was in the category of those who were destined to stay alive, didn't understand Shisui's heart.

His friend looked at Itachi over his shoulder.

«I was about to use the Kotoamatsukami and try to stop the coup d'état... and I had my right eye stolen by Danzō. He doesn't trust me... Regardless of his appearance, he intends on protecting the village in his own way.»

Itachi, who had seen old men like Danzō, knew it. He didn't trust anyone. What he thought was suspicious even for the Third, who was his old comrade in arms.

That man protects the village in his own way.

Itachi felt a shiver running down his spine.

«Maybe also my left eye will be targeted...»

Shisui touched his safe left eye with his own palm. He made the point of his fingers pass under the eyelid, and put strength into them.

«Before it happens, I give this eye to you.»

He clutched the palm that he had put on his left eye. In Shisui's left eye, who had took off his hand and revealed it, the eyelid had closed and fresh blood was streaming down.

Shisui's eye had the Mangekyō Sharingan.

Entrusting it to him meant that he was allowing him to use the power that lodged in that eye. His friend's sense of trust made Itachi's chest tighten.

Shisui...

He didn't manage to call his friend's name. If he said his friend's name, probably tears would overflow from his eyes. He couldn't cry in front of other people. All the more in front of his friend, who kept on talking being ready to death.

«...You're the only friend I trust. This village... the Uchiha name... protect them.»

He looked at the palm he was holding out, and moulded his chakra. One crow came flying from the sky, and stopped in Shisui's hand. The eye on his open palm become visible, he put it on the crow's left eye and they united as if it had been absorbed. Even if he had lost both his eyes and he couldn't see, Shisui, who had said that he entrusted his friend with his left eye, made a smile of relief. Even if he didn't saw that, the crow shook his neck vertically once, and flew into the sky that had turned dark.

«There's another thing I want to give you.»

Shisui turned his back to him again.

«Before that, there's another thing I want you to know.»

«What is it?»

He spat out those words with great difficulty.

But the words he really wanted to say were too much to come out.

“Don't die... Don't give up...”

For his friend, who was already ready to die, those were nothing but convenient words. It was pointless saying them. That's why he didn't talk. Even so, Itachi kept yelling them in the depths of his heart.

Don't die.

If you give up, everything will be over.

A shinobi fights until the very last.

It's not over yet.

However, Itachi's shouts didn't get to his friend.

«I killed my best friend with this very hands.»

Best friend?

Who was he talking about?

At that sudden confession, Itachi's thoughts stopped completely. Then Shisui continued unconcerned, leaving his friend behind.

«It was a little while before I met you.»

Itachi couldn't examine Shisui's expression, who had his back turned.

«There was a man that I can call my friend who I got to know at the Academy. He and I became genin together, so we fought together, being comrades of the same team. For the past me, he was the friend I could trust the most. However...»

At that point, Shisui interrupted his speech once.

«That didn't last even one year.»

His shocking confession continued.

«It was the period when the Great War was about to end soon. Also the missions were much more severe than now. Our team was isolated in another country, in the middle of a mission in the post-war process that we were carrying out together with other teams. Then, unluckily, we encountered a lot of enemies, and we were cornered in a situation in which we waited for our death.»

It was a tale of before Itachi became a shinobi.

«Luckily I had been saved without problems because some comrades that had strayed from their path spotted me, but that friend of mine escaped too late. If only I had stretched my arm, he wouldn't have died.»

Judging from Shisui's words, his friend had been probably killed by the enemies at a short distance. Life and death are decided only by a slight difference of destiny, and separated two people's aftermath. It wasn't Shisui's fault, of course. But Shisui regretted his friend's death as his own sin.

«It wasn't your fault.»

«No...» Shisui said cutting Itachi's words off.

«I was envious of that friend of mine. He had been blessed with more talent than me, and I was jealous of him, who was always running in front of me. That's why that time I hadn't held out my arm, which I should have held out, on purpose... I killed him.» He couldn't help but noticing that a darkness like that was lying dormant in Shisui's heart.

What part of his best friend had he been watching until now?

Itachi felt dizzy.

«The suffering of having killed my friend lasted for some months. It was that time. When I had met you.»

Even now Itachi remembered it clearly.

When he had gone training alone in preparation for his entrance at the Academy, Shisui had appeared suddenly. Shisui was also the one who had suggested that they'd become friends.

«Seeing your figure, who earnestly strived in your training every day, I instinctively called you out. Spending time with you, who always run in front of you, little by little I recovered. I'm really thankful to you.»

I'm even more thankful...

He didn't manage to say those words.

«The death of my friend gave me a new power. It's the Mangekyō Sharingan.»

His eyes got dizzy for the many unexpected turns. Without minding Itachi, Shisui continued.

«In the eyes of the Uchiha, the strength is probably awakened due to the change of a violent feeling. Maybe my eyes awakened for the regret of having killed a friend.»

«Regret of having killed a friend...»

«Yeah.»

He had an unpleasant premonition.

«Kill me, Itachi. Then you'll obtain the Mangekyō Sharingan. If you do it, you'll become much stronger.»

«A thing like that...»

«At any rate, I can't be saved. In this case, it's better if I die entrusting you with a power.»

Itachi felt something hot inside his eyes. He couldn't analyse calmly in his confused head if they were tears, or a torrent of power that made him have the presentiment of a manifestation of a new power.

«Come on, do it! Itachi!»

The words of an older brother that pushes his younger brother's back...

Itachi stepped forward, staggering.

«That's right.»

A tepid thing similar to blood soaked Itachi's cheeks.

Tears...

Itachi kept walking in front of him while holding back his fits of crying, so that Shisui, who was still turned, wouldn't notice.

«Your "ability" doesn't fit into something like a clan. In your case, you'll be able to go beyond the clan's destiny. No...»

«Shisui...»

«I think that your ability is so big that it includes also your sense of values as a shinobi.»

«My ability?»

Itachi understood that his voice was shaking when he heard it in his ears. For the first time, the voice he heard was frail.

«I'm glad I met you.»

«...»

He held out both his arms, which were trembling all over, towards his best friend's back.

«I leave the rest to you.»

Those were the words of his friend's last moment of life.

Darkness...

The dark night was without moon and stars.

It looked like the black clouds that covered the sky would burst into tears at any time.

He had killed his friend.

He pressed both his hands in the place where Shisui was standing just a moment ago, and hung his head down, unable to move. His exhausted body was heavy just like lead, and his wounded and torn mind kept refusing spinning the thread of his thoughts. Tears spilled over and fall from both his eyes one after the other, and he couldn't even stop them with his dry feelings.

Everything and anything was completely paralysed.

No...

Somewhere in Itachi's body, that was becoming one with darkness, something was smouldering. In the vast land of death, which was covered by ice, a small sparkle was burning frizzily. Looking for this faint warmth, Itachi dove into his heart.

There.

Two sparkles.

Inside his left and right eyes.

He held the sparkles tightly in his wounded and exhausted heart.

Thump...

In a twinkle, the sparkles wrapped his whole body, turning into huge blazes. His left and right eyes, which had become their core, were as hot as a mass of magma.

«I surely received it, Shisui.»

In Itachi's eyes, which kept shedding tears, a deep crimson light sparkled brightly.

«I promise you. I'll surely stop the clan.»

Hoping that it reached the realm of the dead, Itachi let the voice of his heart out in the darkness.

Itachi's true story: Book of Dark Night

Chapter 6 – The golden hawk cries in the moonlit night wearing a coat of darkness

1

His grades were impeccable. Taijutsu, ninjutsu, individual, team, tactics. He was ranked first of his year in all the five school subjects. If there had been the feast graduation program still, he'd surely have been a candidate.

Itachi, who was sitting in the porch, looked towards the garden closing his younger brother's result cards. The Uchiha family crest had been proudly painted on the wall that divided the ground. When he looked at that, his younger brother's eyes were somehow lonely.

«Keep doing fine in this way like your older brother, he said...» Sasuke muttered his father's words in a feeble voice. At his unusually lifeless tone, an ill feeling towards his father ran through him.

No.

That feeling was towards his older brother.

Sasuke truly wanted to be praised. However, his father, without understanding his younger brother's feelings, stated his opinion comparing him with his older brother. For his younger brother, who was a child, the words "like your older brother" weren't words of praise, no matter how good was the manifestation of that feeling. At that age he couldn't help but want to be noticed. How much could he think that his older brother was unpleasant? However Itachi, who hadn't got an older brother, didn't understand Sasuke's real feelings.

That's why he tried to ask him frankly.

«Am I unpleasant?» he asked with a smile as he looked up to night sky, which could be seen above the fence that delimited it in the four directions. Sasuke opened his eyes wide, surprised that he had peeped into his heart. Apparently, his answer didn't turn into words. But he silently cast his gaze away from his unpleasant older brother.

«It's okay...» he said gently.

«The truth is that being a shinobi means keep on living and being hated by people.»

Itachi himself couldn't remember how many people he had killed. Among those innumerable corpses, there were relatives and comrades. For people like those, Itachi was an overly bitter enemy.

What would become of Kohinata Mukai's ill children?

He suddenly thought.

«I-in this way...»

His younger brother faltered again. He had an unpleasant feeling when he thought about his older brother, but it wasn't just that. Sasuke's pure eyes were telling him with honesty that the feeling of love he had exceeded that bad feeling.

His own ability tormented his younger brother...

Even Sasuke was a perfect genius. He had never turned back. Moreover, he had almost been crushed by the size of an existence like Itachi.

«...kuku... being excellent is really a problem.»

He looked at his younger brother, smiling with all his might.

«When you have power, you also become haughty because you're isolated. Even if at the beginning you were wanted and requested.»

The Uchiha clan wanted Itachi's genius. But they got irritated by Itachi, who didn't behave as they thought, and in the end they had ordered Shisui to spy him.

If he had been able to go along with their views, maybe they'd have built a much friendlier relationship. Not allowing that was his intention.

Erase the conflicts from this world...

While everyone wanted it, it was a dream that nobody dreamed seriously. Itachi wouldn't allow any compromise in order to fulfil his dream. Because his dream was so majestic that it couldn't be fulfilled if he allowed even a small compromise. That's why he couldn't go along with their views.

As a result, Shisui...

His younger brother stared with worried eyes at his older brother, who had interrupted his speech in midway. After a short pause, Itachi spoke again.

«However... you and I are unique brothers. I'll always be with you as a wall that you have to surpass.»

A demonstration of determination towards his younger brother...

His younger brother stared at him with a gaze full of strength.

«Even if I'll be hated for this... that's what being an elder brother means.»

His younger brother was about to tell him something, but it was erased by the sound of the door, which had been opened violently.

«Are you here, Itachi! Come out! We need to talk!!»

Yashiro's angry voice roared in the entryway.

«It's all right.» Itachi said simply, and leaving his younger brother in the porch he stepped into the entryway.

Inabi at right, Yashiro at left. Tekka, who was prepared in diagonal, was standing behind the two. His father's trusted friend.

«...what is it, why is everyone here?»

Itachi asked Inabi and the others, whose eyes were glinting ghastly, in a clam voice.

The long-haired Inabi opened his mouth.

«There were two people who didn't come to yesterday's meeting...»

His eyes were filled with hostility.

«Why didn't you come?»

He was furious for his indirect way of talking.

Two people didn't come to the meeting...

They were Itachi and Shisui.

Those three already knew about Shisui's death. Moreover, they were asking for Itachi's self-justification for his absence to begin with. It was really a way of speaking that assumed importance with roundabouts.

Glaring at Itachi, who kept being silent, Inabi continued.

«We understand that you joined the Anbu and you've been recruited in various troublesome things. Even your father said so, and he's covering up for you one way or another, but...»

Then, Yashiro took over.

«However, we don't care about treating you in a special way.»

With his haughty words, he placed his own position above Itachi. That series of events took place only for that.

Imbecile...

Itachi repressed a sigh. Then, putting a heavy feeling into his words, somehow he emitted his voice.

«...Understood. From now on, I'll be careful. If you please could leave...»

When they talked further, his rage reached the boiling point.

Itachi wasn't sure he could stop himself.

Yashiro spat out some words while slightly lowering his voice.

«...Right. But before that, there's still another thing we want to ask you...»

As he thought, the real issue started from there.

«About Uchiha Shisui, who has committed suicide by throwing himself into the Naka river yesterday.»

Here they came.

Inabi continued.

«The other person who didn't come to the meeting was Shisui. If I remember correctly, you adored Shisui like an elder brother.»

Which person would order Shisui to spy on him even if they knew that?

Itachi stopped the violent feeling that was about to turn the voice of his heart into words, as if he had swallowed a ball of iron. Then he chose harmless and inoffensive words that would be covered by his public attitude.

«...that's right... we haven't met at all lately, but... I'm sorry...»

Their meeting place at that cliff was a secret that nobody must ever discover. He had no intention of talking about it with shallow people like them and letting them know.

The three of them received Itachi's reply in silence.

They kept glaring at him as if he had been an enemy.

Inabi's extremely practical words broke it.

«...so, we, the Military Police Force, decided to set out an investigation with all our strength.»

«...investigation...!?»

Yashiro fetched a piece of paper folded in two, and opened his mouth handing it over Itachi.

«This is a note Shisui wrote before his death. We already completed a handwriting analysis. He wrote it himself, there's no doubt.»

«...If it doesn't look like a murder, what kind of investigation is it...»

Inabi answered Itachi's question.

«Because it's easy for those who use the Sharingan to copy handwritings.»

Itachi took the piece of paper that Yashiro was holding out. While he unfolded it, Yashiro joined the conversation.

«He wrote it in a very small cut-off piece of paper. It's what he wrote before dying, as you see.»

The last thing Shisui wrote before dying...

That night, after being ordered by Shisui himself, who was going to die, Itachi had wrote it, and he had secretly left it in his room. Therefore, they were meeting again after ten hours. He already knew the content of the letter by heart even if he didn't look at it.

I'm tired of my duties.
For the Uchiha as they are
there's no future.
Then, even for me...
I can't go against
this "path" any further.

What was the "path" that Shisui pointed out?

It was the path that each one of the clan who saw these sentences thought. He was tired of his duties. There's no future for the Uchiha. He couldn't go against that path. In those sentences, which were composed by painful words, there was Shisui's painful scream if he could stop the clan's rampage, even if a little.

But...

It seemed that it wasn't transmitted at all to his brethren.

«The most talented Uchiha... the man feared as Shisui the Body Flicker... A man who would lead any kind of mission as long as it was for the clan's sake.»

Yashiro was the one who said it.

Any kind of mission...

Did he mean like spying on Itachi?

While they were giving him the cowardly order of spying his fellow clansman, they forgot even their feelings of guilt. Then while they praised Shisui calling him a skilled man, they made their own implicit real intention, that is that he was only a useful piece, ooze out.

At that extremely cowardly speech and conduct, the flame of his anger burned violently all at once. Unable to sense such thing, Inabi took over from Yashiro.

«It's difficult to think that a man like that would commit suicide leaving such a *thing* behind.»

Selfish to the bitter end...

«You'd better not judge people... by appearances and assumptions only.»

It was an irony that also included himself. But those three weren't even supposed to be able to understand it. Inabi continued, ignoring Itachi's words and behaviour.

«... We're leaving this note to you for the time being. Keep that and ask a cooperation investigation even with the Anbu.»

«Understood...»

The three of them turned their back to leave.

Itachi was relieved. If they had added even just another word to the conversation, his anger would probably become uncontrollable.

When they were on the threshold, Yashiro spat out some words.

«We hope that some clues will come out...»

Tekka, who had been silent until then, talked to Itachi while turning his back on him.

«Even so, also *we*, the Military Police Force, have some special connection to the Anbu. If you'll omit something, we'll know right away.»

The limit...

He put strength on the hand that was holding Shisui's suicide note.

«... Why don't you say it much more directly?»

The three men, who were about to pass through the door, stopped. The eyes of those men, who had turned around, sparkled crimson.

Their killing intent pervaded the space among the four of them.

Just as he hoped.

«You're suspicious of me, *aren't you?*»

Itachi's vision turned bright red.

«Yeah... that's right. ...*shitty brat*» Inabi said, and his teeth gritted.

Confronting Itachi directly again, Yashiro spat out some words, charging them with killing intent.

«Listen, Itachi... go ahead and try betraying the clan... *and* we won't let you go off easily.»

His body moved faster than his words and thoughts. He kicked Yashiro's throat, hit Inabi's face with his extended arm, and thrust his other elbow into Tekka's solar plexus. The three men clumsily tumbled on the road, with Itachi towering in the middle.

«I already told you. You'd better not judge people... by appearances and assumptions only.»

The three men, who had been hit precisely in their vitals, didn't move as they crouched.

«Because you arbitrarily decided that I was patient, and you *underestimated* me...»

Inabi, who was trembling all over, glared at Itachi raising only his head with great difficulty.

«The clan... the clan... since you wrongly measure the size of you own "ability" in this way, and you don't know the depth of my "ability", now you're on your hands and knees here.»

While he frantically tried to get up standing on all fours, Yashiro spat out some words looking at Itachi over his shoulder.

«...Shisui... has been spying on you lately... half year since you entered the Anbu... the strangeness of your words and behaviour was intolerable lately. What the hell are you thinking...»

«Attachment to a structure, attachment to the clan, attachment to a name... that's a detestable thing that limits your own self, that decides your own "ability"... then you fear and hate the *things* that you don't see... that you don't know yet... it's a foolish thing!!»

They had made his father Fugaku bear the full brunt of it, and ordered Shisui a filthy task, and crawled sneakily like worms hiding themselves in the shadows.

Guys like those had no right to live. If those three, who were the vanguard of the radical faction, died, also their foolish plan would lose its energy a little.

Die...

«Stop! Itachi!!»

A violent voice hit his back as he had taken a decision and was about to jump. In Itachi's field of vision, who had stopped his hand and turned back, there was his father's figure, who was standing stock still with a stunned expression.

«That's enough... what the hell were you doing...»

Without even looking at those three, who were still on the ground, his father walked straight to Itachi.

«Itachi... you've changed a little lately.»

Itachi spat out some words while lowering his head, so that his father wouldn't see his Sharingan.

«There's nothing strange...»

You guys are strange...

Different words crushed the voice of his heart.

«I'm carrying on my duty... that's all.»

«So why didn't you come last night?»

He muttered the answer to his father, who was waiting in silence.

«...to get near the height.»

«...? What are you talking about...»

He had killed Shisui, and obtained the Mangekyō Sharingan.

It was impossible for him to say such things. He got angry with himself for having chosen those words even in a situation like that, and his anger made him grab a kunai.

Without casting his gaze away he threw the blade towards the wall at his right. The sharp point of the blade pierced the centre of the Uchiha crest that had been skilfully drawn. Sweat beaded his father's forehead. When he turned his eyes on his son, his turbulent fighting spirit had flowed out of his body.

Lowering his head, Itachi informed him.

«My "ability" lost all hopes for this worthless clan.»

Had Shisui died trying to help such people with his life?

Was really worth to save this clan?

Itachi didn't understand.

«Things like the clan... you're attaching to *things* so small, and you lose sight of the really great *things*...»

The peace of the village.

Wasn't it a thing that was more important than the clan's resentment?

«Real changes can't fit in a frame of presentments and guesses... of restriction and limitations.»

If only he had severed all his obligations, he could even have lived cooperating with the village. Driving the clan to the wall, he'd have had the pride of trying to protect his small world. His father and the others couldn't see that.

«What arrogance...!!»

Only his father heard the scream in Itachi's mind "arrogance". He was astonished for their overly different opinions.

As he thought, he and they would never been able to understand each other in their whole lives.

In that case...

In that moment, faint image of an ominous future came into focus in Itachi's mind.

His father glared at Itachi while holding Yashiro's shoulders, who was crouched down.

«That's enough! If you say another foolish joke, we'll take you to jail.»

Joke...

The memory of a distant day was brought back to his mind.

It was the day of his first lesson at the Academy. Itachi, who had been asked his dream, had announced it in front of everyone.

"I want to become a shinobi better than anyone else, so that I'll make all the conflicts from this world disappear."

That time, all those who were sitting had thought it was a joke. But even now Itachi kept seriously following after the dream of that time.

Making the conflicts of this world disappear...

No matter how much he'd be laughed at, no matter if they thought it was a joke, Itachi alone was the only one who desired it earnestly.

His father didn't get his son's anguish. When he helped those three to stand up, he blocked Itachi's way.

«Come on, what do we do!!?» Inabi exclaimed in a ghastly voice.

«We can't excuse him anymore. Captain, your order of restriction!!»

He couldn't be arrested here.

The four ringleaders of the coup d'état were gathered now in front of Itachi. If they came to this, he was ready.

Then his younger brother's yell, which sounded like shriek, crushed Itachi's determination.

«Big brother! Stop that already!»

His younger brother was watching him...

His younger brother had heard the words he said just now.

The tense atmosphere broke in a thousand pieces.

Just like a puppet with its threads cut, he collapsed on his knees on the stone-paved road.

He quietly placed both his hands on the ground, and deeply lowered his head.

He couldn't kill people in front of his younger brother...

It was his dignity as an older brother.

And then.

His only concern was not to hurt his younger brother.

«...It wasn't me the one who killed Shisui... but I apologise... for having used improper words... I'm sorry.»

It wasn't an apology coming from his heart. Probably even his father had understood that. However, considering his son's distress, his father answered with a gentle voice.

«...lately, you've been very busy with the missions for the Anbu, and you seem a little worn out...»

«...captain!!» Inabi shouted, criticising his father's weak attitude. His father continued, answering him.

«The Anbu are an organization under the Hokage's direct control... Unless we have a warrant of capture, even we Military Police Force can't arrest him. Besides... I'll take the responsibility and keep an eye on my son Itachi.»

"I beg you..." his father bowed to his subordinates with a husky voice.

«...understood.» Inabi answered reluctantly.

«Itachi... go in.»

His father, who had turned his back on his subordinates, passed through the door. Itachi stared at his back, still kneeled on the ground.

What did you understand?

The flame of his anger that smouldered in his chest hadn't disappeared yet.

This feeling became a violent stream of chakra and flowed into his eyes.

Itachi felt that his Sharingan had transformed.

The Mangekyō...

That instant, his eyes met his younger brother.

*

Fugaku was thinking alone about yesterday's incident.

He was with his arms crossed and his eyes closed as he listened to the sound of the raindrops hitting the roof.

He was off duty.

Itachi had gone out on a mission, and Sasuke was at the Academy. Even his wife was absent because she had gone out for shopping. Fugaku was alone at home.

When they had passé by each other in the hallway this morning, Itachi hadn't even greeted him. He regretted that he wasn't even able to address some words to his son, who had passed by him unconcerned without even trying to meet his gaze.

The kunai that had left a scar on his interaction with Yashiro and the others and on the family crest had clarified Itachi's position.

His son sided with the village...

For Fugaku, who had planned the coup d'état, that was a situation he had to avoid at any cost. The fact that a shinobi like Itachi had turned into an enemy was a serious affair that influenced the outcome of the coup d'état. However, Fugaku couldn't find out the answer to the question if it was really right to distort his son's will.

What would Yashiro and the other think about a boss like that? No one would probably acknowledge a boss that couldn't keep his son from thinking by himself.

It wasn't that he had been cleared from the suspect of Shisui's murder. Itachi had intensified his isolation in the clan.

«Excuse me.»

The voice of a small girl intruded in Fugaku's meditation.

A visitor...

Fugaku stood up slowly, and went towards the entryway, leaving his room.

«You are...»

Fugaku desperately tried to remember the name of the girl that had closed her soaked umbrella and had looked up towards him with her eyes, which looked like as if she had just wept. He was sure she was a girl in the same year as Itachi at the Academy. He had also seen her many times at the meetings.

«I'm Izumi. Uchiha Izumi.» the girl introduced herself with a forlorn voice.

He remembered. She was the daughter of Uchiha Hazuki, who had returned to the clan after her husband died in the Nine-Tails incident. Hazuki must have been two years younger than Fugaku.

«Sorry, but Itachi is gone out on a mission. I don't know when he'll come back.»

His words were so much brusque that she'd thought he was unsociable.

Was she his lover?

He couldn't imagine his son, who thought about nothing but missions, had a lover. But the girl standing in front of him had looked downward with a painful expression, as if she had heard about yesterday's incident. It seemed that she earnestly cared about his son.

«Is that so... Well then, I'll come back later.» the girl called Izumi said, and walked towards the door, turning her back to him.

«Err...»

What a shameful way to call her to stop. Just like a ten-year-old kid.

Izumi turned around, perplexed.

He didn't know if he had said that stop her, or if he had to say something. But his last word shouldn't have turned out as it did. While scratching his own cheek with the tip of his finger, Fugaku put his frank feelings in his voice, glossing over his discomfort.

«He's blunt, but he's a kind guy.»

«I know.» Izumi replied with an unexpectedly firm tone. He added some words, overpowered by those eyes that were looking straight towards him.

«He has got few friends. Please don't abandon him.»

Izumi opened her eyes wide.

He thought she was a pretty girl.

«I rely on you.»

«Okay.» Izumi said clearly, she bowed deeply once, and walked through the threshold turning her back on him, without looking back.

«Goodbye.» Izumi exclaimed with a clear voice before closing the door, and disappeared towards the street under the pouring rain.

Fugaku, alone, was moved by the strong heart of that girl that cared about his son, and couldn't stop those hot things that wetted his cheeks.

2

«Itachi turned twelve. Soon it'll be time.»

Looking down on Hiruzen, who was sitting at the Hokage's desk, Danzō continued.

«With Shisui dead, Itachi has become the only piece under our control against the Uchiha. It's impossible to let him spend every day being busily occupied with various missions as an Anbu under the Hokage's direct control as he's doing now.»

«Promoting him to captain...»

«Like I said before, by raising the official age of one year, the problem of the rules will be settled.»

While letting out a sigh, Hiruzen put a hand on the desk. Taking the pipe he had left there, he lit its head.

The smoke swirled in the air.

As he made the wrinkles at the corner of his eyes become deeper, Hiruzen looked at Danzō and said: «Even if Shisui's death is regrettable, I can't mourn him too much. To think that a shinobi like that would commit suicide...»

Danzō snickered inside his head.

The poison that Sugaru had injected him disappeared into the blood when it killed the opponent. After that, no matter who'd investigate, there was not even one trace left. It was an appropriate technique for a man of the Root whose duties were assassinations. In a stupid organization like the Military Police Force, they couldn't understand Danzō's secret manoeuvres.

If he had one worry, that was Itachi.

There was the possibility that that man would notice. He was bothered by a suicide note Shisui left before dying. It wasn't likely that he had the time to put it in his own room, and threw himself in the river. If he thought that Itachi had wrote it imitating Shisui's handwriting, it felt way more likely. If he made use of Itachi's concern of protecting the peace, he could perfectly deal with him.

Danzō threw some words at the man with whom he had an old friendship.

«Also the Uchiha, who had temporarily settled down for Shisui's death, have begun moving actively again lately. As we are now, we probably can't ward off an accidental discharge.»

«I understand your point.»

«Then?»

«I'll approve Itachi's promotion.»

The corners of Danzō's mouth rose spontaneously.

«Well then, let's go on with the procedures.»

«But this is an exception.»

Danzō replied with a nod.

«When the Uchiha clan's dissatisfaction will be removed, we'll set Itachi free.»

«As long as they're quiet, I won't use Itachi. After that, do as you please.»

Would a day like that ever come...?

Danzō sneered inside his mind at Hiruzen overly optimistic thoughts.

*

«A newly established team because of the increment of the Anbu missions on paper.

With this, the new task of captain. In addition, it has been decided that you'll be elected.»

Danzō, who was sitting in front of Itachi, said simply, straightening up his back. They were in his office of the estate of the Root. Sogoru was standing behind Danzō, wearing his White Tiger mask as usual.

«I've requested that the members of this new team were chosen from the Root, and I got Hiruzen's permission.»

«In this case, have I become a member of the Root?»

«Even if you're not under the Hokage's direct control, it doesn't mean that you're a member of the Root. You could say that it's a special independent unit even inside the Anbu.»

«I don't understand well what it means.»

When Itachi said that with a firm attitude, Danzō smiled.

«Let's say it clearly.»

Danzō interrupted his speech once, and stroked gently his right eye, concealed by bandages.

«Officially, it's a newly formed unit. There won't be new members or anything. It's only an expedient to let you move freely. But I think I'll give you two subordinates as well.»

«For the Uchiha's sake...»

«Exactly.»

Danzō stood up and went around the desk. Drawing near until Itachi's face, he looked down to him with his lightless eye.

«Even if I said that the new members will come from the people of the Root, it's an expedient for not being suspected by the Anbu under the Hokage's direct control. Just like Uchiha Shisui worked for Hiruzen, from now on you'll work for me.»

Danzō had called his friend by his name. At that tone without hesitation, Itachi saw the depth of the darkness of the man in front of his eyes.

The two men in front of him had killed Shisui. He was sure because he had heard it from the person himself that had died.

«Why did you kill Shisui?» Itachi asked, and a comma-shaped pattern appeared on his eyes. Danzō reacted to the Sharingan immediately, and didn't move, still wearing a smile.

«As I thought, you knew it.»

«Shisui tried to stop the coup d'état for the sake of the village. When he was about to, he died by your hands.»

«Do you really think that the coup d'état would be stopped by Shisui's actions?»

Faltering and being at a loss of answers, Itachi felt ashamed of himself.

«In the tactic I thought to prevent the coup d'état, that man's actions were a hindrance. However, that man was called Shisui the Body-Flicker. Even if I, who wasn't his boss, had ordered him not to do it, he probably wouldn't have listened to me.»

«Do you mean that you killed him for this reason?»

«Exactly.»

Killing intent flashed in Itachi's eyes. In a moment, he aimed at Danzō's throat, clutching a kunai in his right hand.

The man in the White Tiger mask blocked his way.

Itachi's kunai pierced Sogoru's palm.

Looking at his faithful subordinate over his shoulder, Danzō resumed talking to Itachi.

«You already noticed, didn't you?»

«Shut up...»

«How can you protect the peace of the village if you do it? And what kind of person is it a person who does that?»

«Haven't you heard me telling you to shut up?»

«You can kill me if you want. But by killing me you won't stop the clan's rampage.

Rather than making a hindrance like me disappear, the clan would get even more excited.

If you killed me, a higher-up of the village, you'd become a criminal. Assuming you'll be able to go out of this estate, you would find yourself in a position in which my pursuers would follow you until you die. Then you won't be able to save your clan. You'll have no choice but watching the terrible spectacle of your clan from outside the village. If you chose such a foolish path, then kill me quickly.»

It was clearly a provocation.

Danzō hadn't the slightest intention on dying. There was only Sogoru in this room, but around him a multitude of subordinates was surrounding him, lowering their breath. If he had tried to kill Danzō, he would have turned them into his enemies and he probably wouldn't even be able to sneak out of the estate.

«Even while you're doing so, your chance to kill me is getting further. There's no time to answer. When a shinobi has decided, he immediately carries out his plan.»

Sogoru slowly pulled out the kunai, and made his body turn around. Danzō stood up boldly at Sogoru's side, who had assumed a stance with one leg bent in front and other extended behind.

«I guess this silence is your answer, isn't it?»

He understood...

There was no use in killing Danzō. On the contrary, his situation would surely worsen.

Itachi had an aspiration to which he had to give more precedence, rather than his personal grudge of attacking his friend's enemy.

He put his kunai away in his vest.

«As I expected, Uchiha Itachi.»

Danzō nodded, looking satisfied.

«Well, let's go back to the point.»

«I'm going back home.» he said, and turned his back on Danzō.

«Does it mean that you can't stand to listen to me further? As I thought, apparently it's not clear to you.»

He walked towards the door.

«If someone except the clan does **that**, surely a grudge towards the village will be left. Another clan would be scared of the Uchiha's end, and they'd probably become a second Uchiha. That's why...»

Itachi put his hand on the door, ignoring him.

Danzō kept on talking.

«Someone of the clan must do it. A young person of the clan going mad... By making them believe this, in the village there will be peace.»

He opened the door with trembling hands, and glared at Danzō over his shoulder.

«Nobody but you can carry out this role.» Danzō declared, and Itachi left the room behind him, rejecting him.

*

Leaving the Root's estate, he walked the path through the forest that was at the base of the Hokage Mountain.

The sound of wings...

It was a bug.

«Don't play dumb. Why don't you show your presence quickly?» Itachi said towards the sky, where the sunlight filtering through the trees was shining. A branch shook above his head, and a human shape flew down in front of his eyes.

«Hi.» Sugaru said in a carefree tone.

«What do you want?»

«*I thought I'd like to talk with you for a little while.*»

«Danzō's orders?»

«*It's my own decision.*» Sugaru said, and put his hand on his White Tiger mask. In front of Itachi, who silently examined his aspect, he silently took off his mask.

«As I thought, it's you.»

«*Yes, it was me.*»

He remembered that face, which was smiling. When Tenma had died during the daimyō of the Land of Fire's escort mission, and Shinko had quit being a shinobi, there had been two replacements. One of them was a girl that chattered often. An the other one was a boy that didn't speak at all...

«I forgot your past name.»

«*It was Yōji.*»

«Right.»

The man in front of him was Yōji, the genin.

«*The Root covers the whole population of the Village of the Hidden Leaf with just ten people. Even so, there are two people especially for the Uchiha clan...*»

«What do you mean?»

«*Surveillance. Apart from the Anbu under the Hokage's direct control, there's a surveillance unit only for the Root's sake.*»

That was Danzō's organization. It was natural that they'd do a thing like that.

«*Despite they spy on the people of the village, the members needed are twelve in total. With only those members, we can know the movements of the village.*»

It wasn't likely that he was talking to him just to display how excellent was the organization he belonged to. Sugaru's speech wasn't over. Itachi silently awaited for Sugaru's words.

«*There's another person that has been ordered to spy on you.*»

Sugaru's sharp index finger slowly turned towards the sky, and pointed to his own chin.
«It's me.»

«What the heck are you spying on?»

«You. For the whole time, since you entered the Academy, I've kept watching only one person: you, Uchiha Itachi.»

He wasn't surprised. Since that time he had been called by Danzō the day of his graduation, he had had a strange feeling. It was a feeling similar to a déjà vu in which he had wondered if he hadn't known that man in the past. If Danzō had begun spying on him since he entered the Academy, he understood that feeling.

«Danzō-sama employed twelve members to spy on the village. The fact that I spy only you is a proof of how long he has set his eyes on you.»

«Even if that man has set his eyes on me, I'm not happy.»

«Apparently I didn't explain myself well. You're already on Danzō-sama's hands. You'll never escape from that kind of darkness.»

«And you came here just to tell me such a stupid thing?»

«My father was an extremely cruel man.»

Those words flew all of a sudden, but he dared waiting for Sugaru's words.

«He was a man that could only display his own power by envying, hating, and suffering for the fact that his son surpassed him. I, who increased his outrage one way or another, have been learning to forget the pain since I became old enough to do understand it.»

Sugaru's stiff voice, who was talking quite indifferently, kept an awfully peaceful sound.

«It was on my fifth birthday. I accidentally fell from my chair, and spilled some juice on my father's clothes, who was sitting in front of me. That day, my father was in a bad mood. He said "The voice you talk with is impertinent", and he sliced my throat.»

His voice became gradually heavier and darker.

«It was that day. The day I killed a person for the first time.»

«So this voice is an after-effect?»

Saying "No", Sugaru shook his right hand.

«For my father's fault, I had completely lost my voice. This is a thing that Danzō-sama found, which became my way of speaking by making the sound of the wings of the bugs that I raise in my body resonate.»

So his coarse voice was a combination of the sound of the wings of his bugs.

«People have darkness dwelling inside them. I discovered it when I was five. However, if I compare the darkness I carry with Danzō-sama's darkness, it's still superficial. My darkness is my personal darkness. But the darkness of that man is the darkness of this village. Now, if you killed that man, the darkness that dwells in his body would overflow into the village at once. If that happened, this village would go crazy.»

«Is that why even you told me not to kill him?»

«The current you can't kill that man.»

«Until I try you can't...»

«I know.» Sugaru said, forestalling.

«You're not ready enough.»

«...»

«Ready to be burdened with your clan's darkness.»

The two didn't make the slightest movement as they glared at each other. But only their dry conversation came and went through the space that separated both of them.

«Do you know that child named Naruto?»

«The jinchūriki of the Nine-Tails...»

«Somehow, he's the Fourth Hokage's son. Don't you think it's strange that he's ill treated by everyone in the village, saying that it's because the Nine-Tails dwells inside his body?»

«Danzō?»

«Yes.»

Curving narrow his eyes, which looked like thin slices on his face, Sugaru smiled.

«Animals like the human beings are coward animals that sympathise with people in a lower position than their own, and with foolish people, and that keep the stability of their own soul while they try to insult them.»

«All the people...»

«They know.» Sugaru answered briefly, cutting off Itachi's words. Then he continued plainly, still smiling slightly.

«Especially those who are born in a star of strong people like you. It'd be better that nobody thought he was strong like you.»

Itachi wanted to become strong, and thought he wanted to be strong, but he never thought he was strong.

«What Danzō-sama did was simple. He spread in the village the reality that "that kid has within his body the Nine-Tails that assaulted the village with panic". After that, the people of the village decided by themselves, and discriminated Naruto arbitrarily. With the moral justification that he was a kid to be feared, they shifted the blame on another person. Everyone is treats Naruto coldly. And by looking down on that miserable kid, they preserve the equilibrium of their souls. Even your clan is being discriminated like Naruto. Isn't it?»

«Do you mean that Danzō is the main cause of the discrimination towards Uchiha clan, too?»

«That's a grudge from before Danzō-sama was born. You can't blame Danzō-sama for everything.»

Itachi was deceived by Sugaru's elusive pace. He had changed the flow of the conversation, and he couldn't grasp the thread end.

«Sacrificing Naruto's life, he makes the village's dissatisfaction disappear. Sacrificing the Uchiha clan, he protects the village's public order. Danzō-sama intends on taking over himself the unhappiness of all the people who live here. He has all the responsibility. That man is ready to take the darkness of the village upon himself. Don't you have this determination? Uchiha Itachi.»

The determination of being burdened with the darkness that has been generated by means of a sacrifice...

For the current Itachi, those words were heavier than anything.

Would he really be steadily burdened with the darkness generated by means of a sacrifice, that is his friend's death?

«As I thought, you can't kill Danzō-sama. And you will never be able to escape from that man.»

Sugaru's words dragged Itachi into the darkness.

«Keep this in mind: I'm always watching you.»

Sugaru's body turned into countless bugs, and whirled up. Countless black dots blotted the sunlight filtering through the trees, which was turning crimson.

«Shisui...» he said towards the sky in which the bugs had disappeared.

«What should I do?»

Itachi had never desired the existence of a god more than this time.

«Answer me, Shisui.»

The fact that his friend's soul was speaking to him didn't mean that a god was offering him his helping hand.

3

In the dark small room, the man with the monkey mask was sitting right in front of Itachi. While sorting the many documents that were lined up on the desk, the man worked indifferent. There were characters that filled closely the sheets of paper, and things that looked like diagrams. There were also photographic portraits pasted on them.

All these were written documents in relation to the Uchiha clan.

Itachi was in the room assigned to him in the Root estate.

«One year since then... In the blink of an eye.» the man in the monkey mask said. He had a voice that sounded like he was twenty or so. Itachi knew the face behind his mask since he was a child. It was a face that he had seen many times since the Uchiha clan had been living in the district built at the margins of the village.

Uchiha Kagen.

He came to know his name when they started working together.

He was a man that didn't stand out in particular, who belonged to a duty post assigned to the second-line action of the Military Police Force. He was ranked genin, and it wasn't that he had particularly outstanding techniques. Even at the meetings, he had never advanced his own proposals, and had always obeyed someone else's opinion.

No wonder...

He was a man of the Root.

The real Kagen had already died.

The man in front of his eyes was a twin. Both his stature and his chakra nature were identical to his younger brother's. These two men used Kagen's face together.

This twins were the men of the Root that investigated the clan's movements as Sugaru had said.

If he was in the duty post of the second-line action of the Military Police Force, he had no chance to put his Sharingan into use. In addition, Kagen himself didn't stand out while he was alive, had no relatives in blood and law, and even if he had secretly swapped places he wouldn't be suspected.

The Root of the village penetrated this deep, until inside the Uchiha.

The man in the monkey mask's true name was Gozu. He said his younger brother was Mezu.

When he said "one year since then", Gozu meant Shisui's death.

«Because of Shisui's death, the radical faction has compelled a revision of the plan, and missed the right time to carry out the plan. It's ironic because as a result his death has slowed down the coup d'état.»

The older Gozu was using honorifics because Itachi was his senior. Gozu and Mezu were the subordinates that had been assigned to Itachi, who had become an Anbu captain

thanks to Danzō. Detached from the other Anbu captains, his task was marking completely the Uchiha clan together with them.

«Assaulting the Hokage mansion with Shisui's Body-Flicker Technique, and kidnapping the Third. This was the core of their plan. It's pretty obvious that their movement weakened when Shisui died...»

«Carry out your task quickly without chattering uselessly.» Itachi told Gozu while looking over the proposed amendment of the plan of the coup d'état according to Yashiro.

As he had said, the abduction of the Third was one of the most important clauses of the plan of the coup d'état his father and the others had designed. They'd kidnap the Hokage, who was the leader of the village, in the Military Police Force headquarter, and they'd engage a battle with the shinobi of the village there, making it their inner citadel. The whole picture of the coup d'état was making the village's part accept the clan's demands using delaying tactics, while they opposed to the shinobi that attacked them.

Their demands were three.

The Uchiha clan's participation to the village's innermost circle.

The demolition of the district and the freedom of residence.

And Uchiha Fugaku's succession as Fifth Hokage...

It wasn't likely that the village's part would accept such unreasonable demands, but those guys of the radical faction seriously intended on thrusting these demands at them.

«As it's written on the proposed amendment that you can read, captain, it seems that they aim at kidnapping the Hokage without relying on Shisui. Soon they'll start moving again, right?» Gozu said calmly, without minding Itachi's rebuke.

He turned his eyes away from the document he was holding, and glowered at his subordinate.

«This impertinence...»

Gozu, wearing his comical monkey mask, shrugged exaggeratedly like a clown.

«Captain!»

A shriek pierced though the door.

«Oi, Mezu! How's your surveillance going?» Gozu asked the man that was standing in front of the door. The man's face was covered by a monkey mask, identical to Gozu's. The difference was the shade of the colour. Gozu's was red, while Mezu's was green. It had been decided that one of the two would impersonate Kagen in the district, while the other was assigned to the surveillance of the clan. If Gozu was here, it meant that Mezu should be in the district.

«Nothin' special. Those guys're movin', captain.» Mezu said pointing his monkey mask towards Itachi, in a somehow ruder tone than Gozu.

«Today, the clan's meeting will be opened, but at this meeting the date and time of the execution of the plan and the assignments of the moment of jumping into action will be communicated to everyone by Fugaku.»

«Did you know, captain?»

Itachi answered Gozu's question shaking his head.

The time that had to come had finally came...

This was a recurring thought in Itachi's brain.

Shisui's death only delayed the coup d'état. One day the clan would surely move again. Not only Itachi thought so, but also Gozu and Mezu here, and Danzō and the other higher-ups, too.

While he focused again on his two subordinates, Itachi's lips moved slightly.

«I knew that there was a meeting today, but I didn't know its subject.»

He hadn't talked enough with his father since then. Since that incident with Yashiro and the others, he hadn't showed his face even at the meetings. Frankly, Itachi didn't know anything except the things he investigated with these two here.

«*You're* going to the meeting, ain't you?» Mezu said, looking at Gozu. The man in the red monkey mask nodded deeply.

Some words instinctively escaped from Itachi's mouth.

«Really... Will it work?»

Itachi had always avoided it intentionally so far.

To face his clan directly.

This was his last chance.

*

He made up his mind and opened the door.

Everyone's eyes converged on Itachi at once.

«What did you came here for?» the man sitting at the centre of the room asked with a voice filled with ill will.

It was Yashiro.

«I came here to talk.»

Inabi, who was sitting next to Yashiro, stood up and confronted Itachi directly.

«What is there to say now? Huh, Itachi.»

The place sunk into silence. While he silently examined the course of the events, he spotted Izumi's face. She stared at Itachi with an expression that looked as if she was going to burst into tears any time now.

«Stop this foolish behaviour.»

He had given voice to his honest feelings. Inabi's right eyebrow, which he had lifted while glaring at Itachi, twitched.

«What do you mean with foolish behaviour?»

«The coup d'état.»

Everyone stirred. Among the crowd, the only one who was looking at him with an indifferent gaze was Gozu, who was impersonating Kagen.

Also Yashiro stood up, continuing after Inabi.

«No matter what *you*, who didn't even showed up at the meetings, will say now, it's useless.»

«The village is not as indulgent as you guys think.»

A vein pulsed on Yashiro's forehead.

«We aren't brats, like *you*. We perfectly know that the village is not indulgent. That's why we have endured until now.»

«If you fight, you'll certainly lose.»

«Shut up!» his father, who had been sitting in the middle of the room with his arm crossed until then, yelled out loud. At his violent rage, the place froze for a moment. His father talked to Itachi, still sitting.

«Those who say they'll lose without even doing anything aren't qualified to be shinobi. Leave this place.»

Disobeying his father's words, Itachi kept staying in his place.

«Leave!»

Not even at his angry voice he moved.

«Do you really think that you'll win, father?» he asked with a gentle tone. After a short pause, his father began talking slowly, choosing his words.

«You're still a child. That's why you don't know the true face of this world. The truth is that in this world no matter how much you try to struggle, it's useless. You can't know yet how much futile a life in which you have to keep enduring until you die is.»

«If the reality is vain, we can change it.»

Yashiro butted in that father-son conversation.

«That's why we're trying to change it!!»

«By supporting a foolish plan that doesn't even take into consideration the possibility of defeat?»

«You're satisfied as long as you make *fun* of us, Itachi! Cut that cocky behaviour. I don't know how excellent you are, but I won't allow your mockery any longer.»

«Be quiet for a while, Yashiro.»

«Captain!»

«I was talking with my son.»

His father, who was feared as Fugaku of the Evil Eyes, glared at Yashiro with his Sharingan full of killing intent. His hot-blooded subordinate sat down on his spot looking dissatisfied while trembling all over.

«Itachi...»

Waiting for his subordinate's silence, Fugaku began talking again.

«Winning or losing is secondary, the essential thing is the fact that we rose up. If we rise up, the people of the village will know the discrimination that the Uchiha have been suffering until now. Then the village will fear us, and will change.»

«We're already feared. As a proof, they gathered the clan in one place, and chased us away at the margins of the village.»

«That time it was a vague fear for the Nine-Tails attack, now it's a fear that brings pain to the reality. It has a different nature.»

«That's just a sophism.»

«Why don't you understand?»

The crease between his father's eyebrows deepened for his bitterness.

«I'm rising up for you guys, and for your children. To change with my generation the situation in which the Uchiha keep being alienated.»

You guys...

He meant Itachi and Sasuke. And for those that would be grandchildren for Fugaku, if they had children.

«If you're thinking about us, why such a foolish behaviour...»

The heartless words that the crowd was muttering reached Itachi's ears, who had been blocked by their voices.

«That traitor, acting so proudly...»

«Get out...»

«Right, get out!»

The angry voices that were rising here and there became a huge wave of power in a flash. This was all disgust towards Itachi.

Even his father no longer knew what he could do about the vortex of angry roars that took the form of a general consensus of the clan.

Itachi had already lost even his fighting spirit to emit some words.

To this point...

He slowly turned his back on his father. Then he helplessly walked towards the door, which had burst open by itself.

He was walking through the compound of the shrine towards the torii.

«Wait!»

Izumi's voice fell onto Itachi's back. He stopped, but he didn't have even the willpower to turn around.

Izumi, who had rushed over him, grabbed Itachi's shoulders placing herself in front of him.

«It's all right... It's all right.»

Izumi was speaking frantically while her eyes became deep red.

«If you don't go back, they'll think you're a traitor, too.»

«I don't care what they'll think.»

Izumi's voice, mixed to her sobbing, felt awfully pitiful.

«Talk with everyone one more time. If you can talk properly, everyone will understand.»

«It's useless.»

«But if things go one like this...»

Itachi left her, tearing off her trembling hands that she had placed on his shoulders, and resumed walking without even looking at Izumi.

«I've already had enough.»

«Itachi-kun...»

Izumi didn't follow him anymore.

He went back home though the road wrapped in darkness. The district had fallen in a dead silence because those who were the clan's most important exponents were all taking part to the meeting.

A human silhouette was leaning against the wall that delimited his field of vision, which was wandering about.

A monkey mask...

The green one was Mezu's.

Itachi proceeded until he was in front of him, and stopped. His eyes were still turned towards the direction he was going to.

«Things have reached the limit here... or so he says.»

He kept staring in front of him without answering.

«How did they intend to hold down the Third, who was called "the professor", I wonder. Kukuku...»

He ignored his mean laughter.

Unable to remain indifferent to Itachi, who hadn't made the slightest movement, Mezu cleared his throat and assumed a serious tone.

«Soon we'll have to tell the higher-ups the result of our investigation, right?»

«I see.» Itachi answered simply, and began walking again.
Among the stars that were sparkling in the whole sky, only the moon couldn't be seen.

4

«We can no longer stand it!»

The first one to talk after hearing Itachi's report was Koharu.

They were in a room of the Hokage estate. They were in the inquiry room that was used when the four shinobi that formed the highest sphere of the village received important reports. Four dark chairs were arranged at the high desk, and from the right the Honourable Counsellor Mitokado Homura, the Third Hokage, Utatane Koharu, and Danzō were sitting in this order.

Itachi had requested an emergency meeting of the higher-ups to inform them about the details of the events at yesterday's meeting, and the situation of the clan he had been investigating with Gozu and Mezu in that period, little less than one year since he had become a captain.

The details of the plot had been made know by Gozu, who remained at the meeting even after Itachi left.

The coup d'état would be carried out ten days later...

They had decided that the plan would start with the assault of the Hokage Attacking Team with Yashiro as their leader.

«If they intend on calling this a “revolution” and usurping our political power, we couldn't help but judge the Uchiha traitors of Konoha.»

«Koharu, wait! Don't rush to conclusions!» Hiruzen rebuked the old woman, who was talking proudly. Danzō, who was looking at him with a cold stare, moved his lips calmly.

«But Hiruzen... the Uchiha clan won't stop anymore. In this case, we have to takes some measures immediately to avoid the chaos... including the unknowing children.»

«Don't say this in front of Itachi!»

Itachi only stared at Hiruzen, who had raised his voice. The fox mask above his head was staring at the void.

Those words, “Don't say this in front of Itachi”, were said to sympathise with him on the surface, but they were an implicit evidence that also in Hiruzen head there were the same thoughts Danzō had. Hiding ugly things from people like that was the village's true nature.

Hiruzen continued.

«Besides, it won't be easy if we have an internal fight with the Uchiha as our opponents. We *must* have some plan.»

How much was this person really caring about the Uchiha?

He entertained a suspicion against Hiruzen's words. While he feared a civil war, he had never once talked directly with Fugaku and the others. It was Hiruzen who had removed Shisui from the ordinary missions, and had allowed him to act secretly. On the surface he said thing that elevated his feelings, but doing so he was just like Danzō, who had been let spy on the clan and promote Itachi to captain.

The conversation continued.

The old people looked at Danzō, who was about to say something.

«This situation races against time... we'll make the first move before they cause something. If you and I, and our Anbu united, will attack them from behind, we'll finish it immediately.»

«The Uchiha are our old comrade in arms... I want to talk with them without using violence.»

Why hadn't he showed this intention much earlier?

It was too late now...

Hiruzen talked to Danzō in front of Itachi, who was muttering these things inside his head.

«I'll think of a plan.»

Hiruzen's gaze fell instinctively onto Itachi.

«Itachi... even if a little... buy us as much time as you can.»

He was the man that had put that into practice, ordering him to buy them some time, wasn't he?

The old people in front of him had only wasted the one-year long time that they had got in exchange of Shisui's life, without working out a concrete plan, didn't they?

The coup d'état would be carried out ten days later.

What would happen by buying some more time for those old people...

«Understood.»

«We rely on you, Itachi.»

Hiruzen's husky voice, who had let his distress ooze out, sounded vain to Itachi's ears, who had spat out those words, opposite to his true feelings.

*

«The Third had said so, but when the time comes he'll work to protect Konoha... he's that kind of man. If it happens, that Hiruzen, as the Hokage, couldn't help but take firm measures.»

Danzō, who was standing in front of the Root's estate, was speaking calmly in front of Itachi.

After hearing Itachi's report, his heart hadn't stop trembling.

The coup d'état was ten days later.

Finally his time had come.

The greatest barrier that endangered the village's public peace was falling apart at last.

Danzō was trembling for the great joy that he would put an end to the history of enmity that had lasted since the foundation of Konoha.

Itachi was listening to him in silence.

He was a wise man.

He had become aware of Hiruzen's self-justified and hypocrite attitude since they were in the conference room. He had already understood Danzō's true feelings. No, it was a feeling that had sprouted in Itachi's heart since his friend Shisui had died, and he had been suspected by his own comrades of the village. That collided with the drawing that Danzō had been drawing for long years.

So...

The two of them, who were standing here in this place, were thinking the same thing.

He talked quietly to Itachi, who kept staying silent.

«Whether it will turn into a war or not, the Uchiha are destined to be annihilated the moment they'll start the coup d'état.»

The plan that the Uchiha clan formulated was too childish. Being driven by the arrogance of their feelings, they had overestimated their own ability.

They gave him the same feeling when he read poems written by those sentimentalists that end their own lives commiserating this world.

They made him sick.

The fact that a prodigy like Itachi had been born in such a shameful clan was a shame.

But people couldn't escape from their destiny. The moment he was born in the Uchiha, Itachi's fate had been decided.

The path of destruction...

The setup of scattering the bait was arranged.

«...including your brother, who knows nothing. But there's still a way to save only your brother before the coup d'état.»

Maybe Itachi wouldn't use that bait, maybe he would. The conviction of the man in front of him was so firm he could see it. He was trying very seriously to fulfil his absurd dream of erasing the conflicts of this world. The Uchiha clan had such sentimentalism.

If he had the firm conviction of avoiding conflicts, even if there weren't the bait of his brother's life, there was the possibility that Itachi would accept Danzō's proposal.

However, adding precaution over precaution was typical of a man like Danzō.

The compensation of only his brother's life in exchange of the annihilation of his whole clan was a thing too cheap to buy.

What in the world would Itachi think of that mean behaviour of taking his younger brother in hostage? His unreadable frozen face, still turned towards Danzō, hadn't made the slightest movement.

This was his time to attack.

If he had wasted time to examine Itachi's true feelings, he would have attacked him immediately.

«If something happens, also your younger brother will come to know everything... If he sees before his eyes his clan being obliterated by the shinobi of Konoha, he'll seek revenge against Konoha...»

He made Itachi's thoughts converge on his younger brother. Then he made him avert his eyes from the fact of the obliteration of his fellow clansmen, and gave him the just cause of saving his younger brother's life.

«In this way there will be no other way except killing your younger brother as well.»

«...is that a threat?»

As he thought, he was a man he couldn't deal with by means of ordinary methods.

«No... I want you to choose.»

He pushed him.

«Will you perish with your family and clan when the coup d'état occurs, sticking by the Uchiha's side? Or will you cooperate with us, by Konoha's side, sparing your younger brother alone before the coup d'état...?»

Judging from Itachi's behaviour so far, he couldn't think of sticking by his clan's side.

But why was this man troubled to that point? Was even a man of Itachi's calibre afraid of the dishonour of killing his clan?

«We have to end this matter before it gives birth to mayhem at any cost, to protect the village. The shinobi entrusted with this task is a double spy of the Uchiha and Konoha...

Itachi, there's no one except you.»

Itachi himself should have understood it. If the Uchiha had been obliterated by a person outside the clan, another clan who lived inside the village would have entertained a suspicion against the higher-ups. If the clans altogether had begun having the suspicion that they'd be politically purged if they were considered a handicap for the village, the situation would have gone out of control. That's why the annihilation of the Uchiha had to be executed by a member of the clan. Some descendant that went mad and murdered his own clan. That was the move that would settle the situation peacefully.

«Itachi... it'll be a painful task for you... but in exchange, you'll be able to spare your younger brother only.»

Itachi had virtually never spoke when they were in the Hokage's estate. Even now, he had decided to stay silent as he stared at Danzō.

Agony...

Even if he had thought that his words were suitable for this man, Danzō perceived a wave of almost tragic feelings in Itachi's silence.

«The feeling I have for the village is the same as yours...»

Taking a short pause, Danzō gave voice to his last words.

«This mission... will you undertake it?»

Itachi slightly clenched his jaw, closing his eyelids, as if the emotions that were about to crush him were too heavy to endure. He began walking like that, turning his back to him. Danzō watched Itachi's departing figure until he disappeared without moving a single finger.

To bathe himself in his own sentiments...

*

Burying his forehead against the cliff from which Shisui had jumped, Itachi closed his eyes tightly. Visions appeared and vanished in his field of vision, wrapped in darkness. Corpses...

Rain...

His father...

And himself...

Itachi was four.

While the great conflict that would be called Shinobi World War was about to meet its end, he faced a battlefield to which his father had brought him. Even now he remembered clearly the mountain of corpses that he couldn't even tell if they were friends or foes.

None of those corpses had desired his own death. Their faces, which were frozen with fear and panic still clung to them, expressed regret.

Itachi, a child, didn't even know what to do. Standing in the middle of those shinobi, who had met an untimely death, he cursed his lack of strength.

From that day...

His feelings had never changed.

Conflicts were foolish acts.

Wars should never happen.

No matter how much the darkness of the people would try to contaminate Itachi, that feeling kept illuminating the path he walked like a sunray.

That's why Itachi had been able to live so far.

Even if he knew his father and the other's conspiracy, and his heart had been injured by his fellow clansmen, who wished for wars.

Even if he was torn between the village and his clan, and his friend had met an untimely death.

Even if it turned out that he'd lead his clan to its demise with his own hands...

«Ku...»

A groan escaped from the gaps of his gritted teeth.

Turning his closed eyelids into a riverside, tears escaped from his eyes and kept wetting the dry bare rock.

He had never shown his tears to anyone.

For Itachi, who had sworn in his heart to become the best shinobi in the world as long as he lived, crying was an act similar to defeat. Erasing all the conflicts meant becoming the most excellent shinobi in the world. In the journey towards this extraordinary dream there was no need of fragility. If he didn't keep walking always firmly, always going in front of him, Itachi's dream would never come true.

And yet his tears didn't cease.

He had lived for twelve years in this world.

Itachi didn't remember too much of having cried. He had always been good and reasonable since he was a child, so he had never bothered his parents crying. Even when Tenma died, and he had awakened his Sharingan, he hadn't cried.

The memory of having cried...

At the battlefield when he was four, and another time.

The day Shisui died.

Even that time he was in this place.

«Shisui...»

Itachi wondered what would Shisui ever have said, if he had been alive here.

The annihilation of the clan...

Would Shisui have allowed it?

Maybe it was impossible.

Shisui would have tried to protect the clan to the bitter end. In that case, Itachi and Shisui would have become just like enemies. Maybe he was lucky that they had parted being still friends, that day.

So...

Itachi had already made up his mind.

When his friend had died one year before, from the moment he had been disappointed by his clan and had harboured wicked thoughts in his head, somehow he felt that this time would come.

The insurrection of the clan, the chaos of the village, and a civil war...

The invasion of the other villages that aimed at an exhausted Konoha.

War would have called war, and a new Shinobi World War would have burst.

In the middle of this chain of hatred, the Uchiha clan.

“It's okay if you are true to your own opinions. You search for an answer wavering, wavering, wavering completely. Then, when you find an answer, don't be perplexed on what you've decided. Find an answer, and have the resolution of sticking to it. This is 'decision'.”

At a time like that, his father's words came back to his mind.

Decision.

The decision he made after that was saying farewell to his clan, and...

Saying farewell to his father.
He had lost his way.
He had lost his way long, long ago.
He had always regretted his own foolishness, while he looked at Shisui's back.
Maybe his method had been much better than his.
However...
«This is the best move.» Itachi muttered as to persuade himself. At the coldness of the world he himself had spat out, his chest tightened hard.
His wailing soaked the dark night.
That day, when Itachi came back home his family was already asleep.

5

Root's estate, Danzō's room.
«I'll do it.»
Danzō was the only one who heard Itachi's words. He stood up from the chair that was behind the desk, and got near him with heavy steps.
«I had thought that you'd say so.» Danzō said, and his palms, which he had placed on his shoulders, were awfully cold.
«Don't worry about your younger brother. Even if you disappeared, the village will bring him up with full responsibility.»
He had decided to massacre his clan. Even if that was a mission, it was a kind of thing that could never be made public. Officially, Itachi's position would be that of a criminal that decided to slaughter his clan after going mad. Of course, he couldn't stay at the village.
Now, he had no choice but trusting the word of a man like Danzō.
«You'll do it the day before the expected date of the coup d'état. How about it?»
Danzō's intention was crystal clear to Itachi.
His next mission was a surprise attack. A sneak attack to exterminate the clan, who knew nothing, all at once. In the same night in preparation for the coup d'état the day after, everybody would refrain to go out to gather the energies. It would be easy to perceive accurately everybody's movements. In addition, with everyone's thoughts on the coup d'état of the day after, there shouldn't be room in their head for the thought of receiving a surprise attack.
«Understood.»
«Let's tell Hiruzen you're desperately working with the village.»
He had already taken a decision. He had no intention of continuing this conversation with Danzō. He was thinking about his younger brother. About every thing after his mission would be over.
He had taken upon himself the grave sin of slaughtering his clan for the peace of the village.
He was disappointed in himself because he wasn't able to find any other way besides that one. And he constantly thought how would he apologise to Shisui, who had died entrusting him with that future.
The decision of a future of discouragement...
That was his rightful place.
Nothingness...

No matter how much he searched inside his heart, no feeling appeared. Whatever he saw or heard, his heart was constantly dying down.

«What about Uchiha Kagen?»

He was the member of the clan that Gozu and Mezu impersonated.

«Aah...»

Danzō opened his mouth as if he'd just remembered about them.

«I've decided that one of the two will die. If you find Kagen, kill him without problems.»

«Is that okay?»

«The shinobi of the Root aren't afraid of dying as long as it's for the mission. Both Gozu and Mezu would die with pleasure. Don't hesitate. If there were missing people besides you in the Uchiha clan, this plan would become useless. In that case, you won't be able to guarantee your younger brother's life.»

Even now Danzō was blackmailing him. It was typical of him to suspect Itachi's determination that much. The suspicion of that man that didn't know the word "trust" was almost pathetic.

«Understood.»

«Good.»

He turned his back on Danzō and walked away. When he put his hand on the door, his voice called him from behind.

«It'd be better if we won't meet again until the execution of the mission. It's the last time we're having a conversation with you as a Konoha shinobi. You've worked well for the village's sake so far. Thank you.»

Ignoring Danzō's words, so out of character for him, Itachi passed through the door.

Then he closed the door behind him.

«I'll be a Konoha shinobi until I die.» Itachi muttered by himself in the hallway, gloomy even if it was midday.

*

Hidden in the blind spots of the surveillance cameras of the Anbu, Itachi was staring motionlessly at the compound of the Naka shrine that appeared under his eyes. He was in one of the trees of the shrine's wood. After choosing one with good ramifications, he had hidden himself among the abundant leaves.

There were three days left until the actuation of the coup d'état.

He had to find a solution at any cost before then. After parting from Danzō, Itachi had continuously been guarding the Naka shrine.

The fruit of his labour was about to appear. He had this presentiment.

A man came out of the main temple, opening the door and examining his surrounding. A white-haired man.

«Yashiro...» Itachi muttered the man's name, who was walking towards the torii just below his eyes.

Without even waiting that he disappeared completely, he stood in front of the closed door. He promptly opened the lock, and went inside so quickly that the surveillance cameras didn't catch him.

"Don't disappear yet..." he whispered in his mind, praying silently the man of his intention.

When he removed completely the seventh tatami mat to his right, there was a staircase that led underground.

It was a secret meeting place.

He ran down the stairs.

He opened again the closed door he had closed the other day while being targeted by his fellow clansmen's exclamations of hatred.

«Nh?»

In the inner part of the meeting place there was a stone monument with the Uchiha clan's history engraved on it. The man of his intention was standing before it.

The man in the orange mask...

«Uchiha Itachi.»

«Long time no see.»

They met again for the first time after Tenma had been killed.

«Four years since that... you've grown a lot.» the masked man said, stretching both his arms.

«Did you instigate those guys?»

«Don't say things that'll make me look mean. I've only taught him the history of the clan.»

«What are you planning, Uchiha Madara?»

«How...»

The masked man put a hand on his chin. In that position, he talked to Itachi.

«We can't stay here if someone comes. In addition, the district is guarded by those guys of the village. Can we leave this place and talk for a little?»

«All right.»

The man's body, who had listened his reply, was sucked in the hole of his mask, and appeared behind Itachi.

«Follow me.» the man said, then they climbed the staircase that led to the main building, and went outside. As if he knew exactly the places where the surveillance cameras had been skilfully hidden, without hesitation the man left the district choosing the blind spots, he easily slipped thought the village's prying eyes and crossed the border.

They proceeded for a while, leaving the Village of the Hidden Leaf, and the main road that led to the Village of the Hidden Sand appeared. There was a small shrine near the main road, and a large wood that spread as if it was protecting it. Hiding inside it, the man stopped running.

The moon, which was floating above the grove of the cedars, showed its slightly distorted figure just before becoming a perfect circle.

«How did you know about me?» the masked man asked, putting both his hands on his waist. Those words implicitly confirmed that he was Madara.

«You... you slipped through Konoha's defences, and examined even the secret stone of the Naka shrine... only the members of the Uchiha know about that...»

The first time he sensed the man's presence was during the clan surveillance mission of the Anbu. Ever since, Itachi had seen a flickering of the air inside the district many times. It was the same scene he saw when Tenma died.

That's why he immediately understood that the man in front of him was creating that interference.

«I've investigated your movements since then... and I tried to understand what kind of person you are and which ideology you have.»

So, the man in front of him was Uchiha Madara.

He had thought that he had died at the end of his fierce fighting with the first Hokage, Hashirama Senju, seventy years before, but there was no one that actually confirmed his death. From the perspective of both the incident of the daimyō escort mission four years before and the fact he loitered around the clan's district, he felt his connection to the Uchiha and attachment to the village. And that night, knowing that this man had met with Yashiro, Itachi's guessing turned into belief.

«...in that case, it will be a short talk...» the masked man began.

«If it's so, you know that I'm a member of the Uchiha clan, and that I hate both Konoha and the Uchiha.»

Uchiha Madara had recruited comrades to oppose against the Senju clan, which had tried to discriminate the Uchiha. However the members of the clan had alienated Madara, who wanted a war, and had betrayed him, who was their leader. Madara, disappointed, fought with Hashirama alone, and they said he had died.

The grudge between Konoha and the Uchiha was supposed to be an uncommon thing. If he had educated Yashiro as the radical faction of the coup d'état, he was acting to get revenge against Konoha.

But there was no way he'd allow his revenge against the village of Konoha.

«...I have a condition...»

He began talking with a haughty attitude.

«I'll guide your hand on the revenge against the Uchiha... in exchange, you won't lay a hand on the village. And... on Uchiha Sasuke as well.»

He forcibly pointed the point of his spear, which was aiming at the village, towards the clan. At this coerciveness of his, Madara raised a short laugh without hiding his surprise.

«What if I refuse?» Madara asked tilting his head, concealed by the mask. When he reacted to that emotionless face, Itachi spat out the words he had already prepared.

«If you decline this proposal, you'll become my enemy as well.»

«Can you kill me?»

«The point is not if I can or not. I'll kill you.»

He was walking a path in which he couldn't retrace his steps anymore. He didn't hesitate. Silence wrapped the two.

None of them had a killing intent. They were exchanging dangerous words, but they had both acknowledged their opponent.

«Apparently I guessed wrong, but that brat wasn't your friend.» Madara said while turning both his palms towards the sky. With "that brat", he meant Yashiro.

«I'm throwing the stones of various possibilities. Just by chance one of these had successfully rolled over. It's not bad that it returned to my palm here. No...»

The small darkness that had been opened in his mask seized Itachi and didn't let him go.

«Choosing you, rather than that small fry of the clan, looks funnier...»

Small fry...

Itachi surely agreed with him, but the next moment Sasuke's face came back to his mind, and he felt a sharp pain in his chest.

«This discussion of yours... let's get along with it.»

Itachi turned his eyes away, ignoring his stretched palm.

He carefully put his shoes on.

Today's mission would completely change Itachi's life.

He still hadn't put his shoes on.

Also his quiet hours would be over today.

It was all right...

He was ready to take this crime upon himself.

«Bid brother...»

Sasuke's calling voice stopped Itachi, who was about to stand up. It sounded completely like a pure appeal to stop this family and the clan. Itachi had decided to stay, even if for a little while, because if he went out, he wouldn't have been able to come back home again. He was already half-standing but he sat again on the doorframe, and looked back towards his younger brother.

«Help me with the training with the shuriken technique today...»

A request he wouldn't be able to grant another time.

To tell the truth, he always wanted to stay with him. He wished the day would come in which Sasuke became a full-fledged shinobi, and they went out on missions together. But he couldn't fulfil even that anymore.

Even if he was troubled by the answer, somehow he gave voice to his official lie.

«I'm busy... you'd better be taught by Father.»

«But when it comes to shuriken techniques, you're more skilled than him, big brother... even a child like me understands it.»

His younger brother made a sour face while crossing his arms behind him and lowering his eyes. Thinking about it, he had always kept his brother at a distance with the pretext he was busy. He thought it would have been better if they had faced each other more, but it was too late for regrets.

«...Big brother, when you act like this, you always treat me like a burden.»

“No...” he wanted to tell him. But he never said that word. Because from now on, he would live cursed by his younger brother for his whole life...

Still silent, Itachi beckoned him.

Without having the slight suspicion, Sasuke walked towards him. Holding back his energy, he poked his younger brother's forehead with the index and middle finger.

«Forgive me, Sasuke... another time.»

«Ouch.»

Itachi watched his younger brother's forehead, who had pouted making a sour face, becoming a little red. When he was a child, he felt Sasuke's growth in base on how much pain he felt.

If he had stayed here any longer, he wouldn't have stood up again...

With this resolution, Itachi stood up, and walked away with heavy feet. Then he only said some words, without looking at his younger brother.

«...today I won't have any time to look after you.»

«You poke my forehead all the time saying “Forgive me, Sasuke...” but I never see this “today”...»

Leaving his complaining brother behind, he opened the door of the entryway.

Forgive me, Sasuke...

The moment he got through the door, he apologised to his brother from the bottom of his heart.

*

The cliff of his pact with Shisui...

He had spent about seven hours already in meditation, sitting on the edge. No matter how hard he tried to chase his thoughts away, his thoughts, succeeding one next to the other, never disappeared. The twelve years of life he lived so far, like a flashback, flashed and disappeared in his mind, flashed and disappeared.

His childhood memories, when he wanted to become nothing but strong.

The days he fought despite the hardships for the troubles with his comrades and fellows, when he became a shinobi.

Then all the ties of obligation that dragged Itachi into the darkness.

When he passed through his good and evil feelings, his memories became confused and washed his thoughts away like a muddy stream. Itachi only surrendered himself to this current of recollections.

It was too late to regret now. But it doesn't necessarily mean that his feelings were perfectly clear.

The karma Itachi would bear from now on wasn't a thing he could easily explain. It was in a position in which it transcended his memories and his doubts and his hesitations and his resolution, everything. That's why Itachi himself didn't foresee what kind of person in the world he'd become after the day was over. The only thing he understood clearly was the fact that a day like today was over only meant that his brother would be the only member of the clan left this time, and everyone would have died.

It was completely as if everyone understood the fact that the day in which they die would eventually come...

«Fuu...»

Itachi inhaled deeply. Between his slightly opened eyelids, the rays of the sunset illuminated his field of vision, concealed by his eyelashes.

Soon it would be the moment.

The arrangements were already set.

If Itachi moved, also Madara would move.

Today, there was no one besides the clan in the district. It was a trick skilfully carried out by Danzō and the people of the Root. They had simulated an accident, so nobody noticed Danzō's trick.

It wasn't the only tactic.

The Military Police Force had come back home earlier.

It had been decided that today some merchants would come at night in order to renew the equipment of the headquarters. For this reason, the members had been ordered by the village to go home earlier. Obviously, that order had been made up by Danzō. Dead people tell no tales. If the people involved were all dead, there was no one to tell that a fake order had been sent. For those who were waiting for the actuation of the coup d'état tomorrow, going home early was convenient.

The last tactic...

The fact that his younger brother's homecoming had been delayed. It had been decided that today a teacher of the Academy would help him in his training with the shuriken technique. This teacher was an impostor impersonated by a person of the Root. It had been decided that the shinobi of the root would deceive him with a disguise so ingenious that his younger brother, who wasn't even a genin yet, couldn't possibly see through.

As for the rest, Itachi had prepared himself to go towards the district.

«Well then, I'm going.» Itachi said to the empty sky, standing up.

He was looking at Shisui's illusion in front of him.

Today, everything would be over.

The clan's destiny, and Itachi's peaceful life...

*

Itachi lowered the sound of his breath hearing the cheerful talking voices coming from the other side of the hallway. In the room, illuminated by the light of a fluorescent lamp, there was a dining table.

The talking voices were those of two women.

He knew one of them well.

The other one was her mother.

Itachi kicked the garbage can placed at his feet, and making noise on purpose.

«What?» the familiar voice asked her mother.

«I don't know.»

«I'll go see.» she told her mother with a hint of nervousness in her tone, and her presence slowly got near Itachi.

Running through the hallway without being sensed, he hid in a room nearby. Then, waiting for her presence to pass through it, Itachi slipped towards the dining table, and before her mother, who had noticed him, emitted a shriek, he made her lose consciousness with his Sharingan.

He laid her down without a sound, and waited for the presence to come back.

«Mum, the garbage can has fallen and...» Uchiha Izumi said, and stopped.

«Itachi-kun?»

Lowering his gaze onto her collapsed mother, Izumi stared at him in a blank daze, with the look of someone who didn't know what the heck was happening.

«W-why...»

He couldn't hear Izumi's voice more than that.

He gathered chakra in his eyes.

Mangekyō Sharingan.

«Tsukuyomi...»

Izumi was standing stock-still.

Itachi made his thoughts converge on his own genjutsu.

The genjutsu "Tsukuyomi" could control time and space and everything that had a mass.

It was an ability that Itachi obtained when he awakened the mangekyō Sharingan.

The time that passed inside this genjutsu was one hundredth, one thousandth, one ten-thousandth of the time in the real world.

Itachi was precisely drawing some images.

The peace of the Village of the Hidden Leaf, the peace of the clan.

His figure free from all the suffering.

And then...

Izumi laughing next to him.

Izumi had become a chūnin, following him.

That time, Itachi had already become a jōnin.

He handed an engagement ring to a sulking Izumi.

Izumi retiring as a shinobi.
Marriage.
Childbirth.
Childcare.
The setting off of their children.
Izumi aging together with Itachi.
Seventy years after they met.
Their hair was white.
Izumi's illness.
Her sickbed.
He nursing her.
Their remaining years...

The mangekyō Sharingan, which consumed an enormous quantity of chakra, gave a considerably responsibility for the user of the technique. Itachi took a deep breath, as if he had just crawled out of the bottom of a deep sea. In front of his eyes, Izumi had collapsed on her knees, smiling.

Itachi supported her body, sliding next to her, and grabbed her thin shoulders tightly.

«Thank you.»

Izumi's voice, who was smiling, sounded like that of an old woman who was beyond her eighty.

«Thank you more...»

He strengthened his grip on her shoulders, and his voice faded out.

Izumi, who was smiling with her whole face, was still breathing calmly.

Mind and body are indivisibly.

If the mind rots, also the body falls apart.

Izumi died wrapped in happiness.

When he gently put Izumi, who had stopped moving, on the floor, Itachi stood up somehow, staggering. That intense loss of chakra made his body tremble.

For the first time he had made up his mind with Izumi...

By killing her with his own hands, he had shook off his last doubt.

The doubt of a bond of love that wasn't attachment towards his clan.

«Thank you, Izumi...»

Itachi looked around aimlessly. There, her mother had collapsed, stunned by his sharingan.

*

When he went out of Izumi's house in the main street, suddenly the empty space behind him flickered.

«Have you begun already?» Madara began speaking in a flat voice. Without even turning around and looking at his figure, Itachi felt only a little concerned.

The sky in front of his eyes was about to be concealed by the nightfall. The evening star that announced the arrival of the night looked awfully nice.

«I'll get rid of as many women and children as I can.»

Madara's solicitude made Itachi irritate.

«I'll do the west of the village, you'll do the east. All according to the plan we've decided before.»

«Don't work too hard.»

«Shut up.»

«You're still a kid. When the darkness is too much to bear, you fall apart.»

He had already been broken a long ago...

He swallowed the words that had floated in his mind, and looked at Madara, turning around. There was no way of knowing the expression on his face, covered by the mask. From Madara's whole body, which was completely dressed in a black coat until his shins, an ominous chakra filled with killing intent seeped out.

«There's no need to worry.»

«I'm not worried. It's a natural arrangement to carry out the mission steadily.»

«Don't underrate me.»

«I'm acknowledging you perfectly, that's why I don't want you to waste your strength pointlessly, that's all. Dealing with women and children that cry and scream and run about trying to escape is my duty, since I can use a space-time ninjutsu. It's the result that takes precedence over efficacy, don't you think?»

He had to make it all end by the time Sasuke came back home to the district. He had no time to waste chattering with Madara like this.

«Do as you like.»

«Let's meet again after everything will be over.» Madara said, and disappeared into thin air.

He took a short breath.

He closed his eyes...

He revolved into the darkness, searching for a new target.

*

Inabi's wife had begun her trip faster than she could realise what was happening. When he shook off the blood that had soaked his blade, swinging his sword, Itachi turned his eyes towards his target, who had his breath taken away.

«D-do you understand what you're doing?»

Inabi threw his stupid question.

Without answering, Itachi slowly closed the distance between them. Each time he got nearer him step after step, Inabi retreated.

«How about preparing yourself?» Itachi told him gently, and Inabi opposed him shaking his head.

«What are you afraid of now? The consequences of what will happen have just appeared in front of your eyes.»

«T-traitor...»

«Since you guys have kept everything and anything at a distance in this way, you're about to be killed by me like I'm doing now.»

He firmly kicked the floor.

He closed the distance between them.

Inabi tried to form hand seals.

Fire Release.

Too late.

Before the flames spurted out of his sharp mouth, Inabi had already lost his head.

*

He put his hand on the door of the entryway.

Inside the house, which had sunk into silence, only the chakra of one person was flickering.

Inside the hallway.

There was a presence in the last room at the end of it.

He placed a hand on the sliding screen.

«Who's there?»

Without answering the voice coming from the other side of the room, Itachi opened the sliding screen.

«You?»

The face that was looking straight at him sitting upright was stern. The black dot on his forehead was undoubtedly Tekka's.

«There was someone's chakra flickering in the district. Were you that criminal, Itachi?» Tekka, who was a prominent Sharingan user even among the Uchiha, excelled at the ability of sensing chakra. It wasn't strange that he had cleverly understood the calamity that was happening in the village.

«You're here. In this case, what's this out-of-place flickering of chakra now?»

«It's not the case to worry about a thing like that.»

«Indeed...»

«If you felt that there was something unusual in the village, why didn't you move?»

«You came before I moved. That's all.»

Tekka tried to stand up.

His ninja sword in his hand, Itachi stepped into the room right away. The head in front of him lifted, and seized Itachi.

The Sharingan...

Itachi received the surge of chakra emitted from Tekka's eyes from the front without hesitation.

«Na!»

A surprised look spread on his target's face. Apparently he was surprised for the fact that his ocular technique hadn't worked. One second later, it turned into an expression of regret, when he recognised the pattern that had appeared on Itachi's eyes.

«D-don't tell me, a mangekyō!»

The moment Tekka yelled, he received the sword on his stomach.

He thrust it deeply until the base.

As he inserted the blade, the blood didn't spurt out.

Their two faces got so near that their noses touched.

«Misreading the opponent's ability is you guy's weakest point.»

«Itachi...»

Blood was running down from the cracks of Tekka's clenched teeth.

As he jumped back, he immediately extracted his ninja sword.

A great amount of blood soaked the tatami.

The spurt of his blood hadn't showered him at all.

While tossing his right hand up, scratching the empty air, Tekka fell on his knees.

«I won't forgive you, Itachi...»

Those became Tekka's last words.

He turned his back on his corpse, and put his ninja sword back on its scabbard.

«I'm not asking for your forgiveness.»

*

In the only room of the apartment for single use there wasn't even a bed. Inside that small room, which didn't felt like someone was living in it, a man was sitting leaning against the wall.

«Kill me quickly, captain.»

By that rude speech, it was clear that the man was Mezu.

The darkness concealed Mezu. No matter who had seen him, that figure was undoubtedly Uchiha Kagen. Dragging his feet heavily, Itachi went standing in front of Mezu.

«If you don't kill me, Captain-san, everything you're doin' will come to nothing. No need to worry. Make it end quickly.»

«You're okay with it?»

«I've been ready for this since I was found by Danzō-sama.»

Mezu, wearing Kagen's face, made a lonesome smile.

«As a younger brother, I've been thinking a lot of times I wanted to stay in my brother's place.»

Without showing a shiver, Itachi pierced Mezu's chest, who was smiling.

*

One hour had already passed since Izumi fell asleep.

Itachi had already killed more fellow clansmen than he could count, and yet he kept hurrying.

His mind had frozen long ago.

He had forgot everything, even that it was for the peace of the village and his concerns.

He just kept wielding his sword.

His target's father and mother, and his wife.

When the young boy, who looked like he had just entered the Academy, didn't move anymore, he heard a shriek behind him.

It was a familiar voice.

While making a commotion and an exaggeratedly loud noise, he escaped through the corridor.

He tumbled down the entryway, and opened the door.

He followed him.

They went out on the street.

The man escaped clumsily.

As if his throat had become stiff for the panic, he didn't even yell.

There was no one already around him except the man. No matter how much he yelled, he wouldn't be noticed.

He passed under the stone gate that was on one side of the road. In front of him there was a public park.

The playground equipment was scattered on the rectangular ground. The man fell down head-first in the place he had gone till an open space while he was frantically pushing his way through the swings to the point of being pathetic. Itachi stopped just one step away from the distance between two edged of a sword, and looked down on the man that was trying to get up.

«Give up.»

At Itachi's cold words, the white-haired man trembled.

He was Yashiro.

«B-by killing me, you won't solve anything. The ringleader is someone else. Not even Fugaku-sama knows about him. I've been manipulated.»

«You're still trying to hide in someone's shadow even at the last moment?»

«Believe me. I'm only trying to inherit that person's will. That person is this clan's...»

Yashiro's eyes opened wide, and hardened as he looked behind Itachi.

«Y-you...»

«Long time no see. Though we met only two days ago.»

Yashiro was trembling, looking at Madara's figure.

«Why?»

At that childish question, Madara laughed in a disgusted voice.

«Don't call me for such an idiotic thing, Itachi.»

They had decided in advance the means of an emergency union. If Itachi released his chakra thinking about Madara, he would show himself using his space-time ninjutsu.

«Sorry, but I chose Itachi. That's all.» Madara explained quickly, and Yashiro, looking up towards him dumbfounded, looked like as if he had lost even the willpower to retort.

«Well, I guess it's useless, but you'd better resist as much as you can.»

«W-wait a se...»

«I leave the rest to you. I'll continue my task.» Madara told Itachi, and disappeared into thin air again.

«The feeling when the thing you believed unconditionally crumbles down... do you understand it too a little?»

«Ku...»

Because of those men Shisui had lost his hopes for the clan, had lost everything, and then he had died. Itachi thought about Shisui, if that would have consoled him even if a little.

«Come on, what you're gonna do?»

When he thought only that useless question, Itachi waited for Yashiro's answer. If he had realised his own mistakes here, he wouldn't have opposed useless resistance until now.

«I-I understand well your feelings. I-I'll stop the coup d'état. T-that's why I'm begging you for...»

«For your life?»

«I beg you, Itachi. No, Itachi-san.»

His figure was extremely pathetic. He was so conceited to think he could stop the coup d'état at his own discernment. If that man hadn't been tempted by Madara, maybe the clan would have followed a different destiny. When he thought so, a killing intent, which looked strange even to him, surged in his chest.

«Stand up.»

When Itachi hurled that heartless order at him, Yashiro looked up at him while opening his narrow eyes wide with all his might.

«If you are a shinobi, why don't you fight me fair and square?»

«...»

«Did you forget your shinobi pride?»

Trying to control his fear somehow, Yashiro stood up as he shook his head, bracing himself.

«Don't make light of me too much.»

«Since you're so good at boasting, why don't you make it quick.» Itachi said simply, and Yashiro's eyes turned red in front of his eyes.

Without even defending himself, Itachi received his Sharingan straight on. Yahiro's chakra rushed around Itachi's body, turning into that spider web called "ocular technique".

«Fire Release!»

Yashiro, who had taken a deep breath with all his stomach, inflated his cheeks while yelling.

He became impatient because nothing but his breath came out.

«What happened to the flames?»

«Eh...»

Itachi stared ruthlessly at Yashiro, who had honestly expressed his surprise.

«After you'd have weakened my movements with the Sharingan, you'd have released the Great Fireball. Since you'd have foreseen that I'd have avoided it jumping, you'd have hit me with a kunai or something in a defenceless spot. In this way, after a forestall, you'd have been one move ahead of me using your Sharingan again, in a close combat this time. That's about it, right?»

He took one step towards Yashiro, who was standing bolt upright.

«The ability of living in this world and a shinobi's ability are two completely different thing.»

«A-a-a...»

Without even managing to emit some words, Yashiro only waited standing stock still for Itachi to draw near him.

«You didn't even notice that you had fallen into my ocular technique when you fell, since your head was so ruled by panic.»

Only after Yashiro heard those words he realised that Itachi's eyes had turned red.

«I told you to fight to make you fully realise your powerlessness.»

«Au, aa...»

Having opened his mouth carelessly, Yashiro was drooling.

«You have misjudged me from the beginning.»

Itachi's Sharingan changed.

The mangekyō.

«Tsukuyomi.»

For the second time that night, his mangekyō Sharingan lured Yashiro into a cold darkness.

Yashiro, who had been crucified in a cross that was standing in the middle of a jet-black sea, was looking around restlessly, confused.

Here and there the liquid surface of the darkness was rising, and it gradually formed human shapes.

Countless Itachi.

Ninja swords were clutched in their hands.

«This is a world I control...» Itachi muttered, and his hand stretched towards Yashiro.

«Guaaa!»

The sword, which had been pushed out, pierced Yashiro's stomach. The Itachi that had pierced him disappeared into the sea of darkness.

«I won't let you die once.»

The blades pierced through Yashiro's body one after the other.

He turned into a silver hedgehog, and stopped moving completely. The moment Itachi returned to the sea, his ninja sword disappeared. The group of Itachi covered again Yashiro's field of vision, who had made an expression of relief.

«Because that's the true agony.»

Yashiro's face, which was contracted for the spasms, turned into a smile, since he had already gone beyond fear now.

In the time of less than few seconds in the real world, those two faced each other in silence. The interval of that moment probably seemed some days for Yashiro.

In the dimension of the genjutsu created by the mangekyō Sharingan, he continued to receive the blades on and on. When he had been released in the real world, Yashiro's mind had already broken down.

«Deh... Death... Dehehe*...»

While looking down on Yashiro, who was laughing as he trembled spasmodically, Itachi slowly unsheathed the ninja sword he was carrying on his back.

Somebody's voice would probably not reach Yashiro's ears anymore.

He had no words to tell him now.

His merciless sword flashed, and that pathetic man's head revolved into the moonlight night.

*

Itachi returned back near the gate of the district.

The only survivors of the Uchiha clan that lived in this district had already become only one family.

Only Uchiha Fugaku's family...

Soon Sasuke would come back home. Although he was feeling impatient for not hurrying, Itachi turned his feet towards the gate of the district to come back home.

Squatting on the top of a telephone pole, he looked down at his feet. From here, he could see well the main gate of the district.

There was a frightening huge moon behind him.

The streets, in which the human presence had disappeared, had sunk into silence.

He heard the cry of a crow in the distance. At the echo of this cry, he imagined that a jet-black crow was wandering about, having lost its flock.

Someone had passed under the main gate.

A young boy that was carrying a bag on his shoulders.

His beloved brother.

While he watched his brother's figure running under his eyes, Itachi thought that he should have talked to him long, long ago.

The words he wanted to tell him were like a mountain. How many were the things he couldn't tell his brother? One or two... No, he wouldn't have been able to tell him even one true thing.

As if those words, too many to be counted, were whirling in his mind, there was just one thing that Itachi had to tell his brother.

«...»

Itachi hid in his chest that thought, which hadn't turned into voice, and jumped towards his own house leaving his brother behind, who was hurrying back home.

*

There were two presences inside the room. As if he had been called by them, Itachi walked through the familiar hallway without even taking off his shoes. As he opened the door, he spotted the figures of both his parents sitting one next to the other.

He stood behind him without a sound.

«Is that so... did you choose the opposite side...» his father said in a voice that suppressed his emotion, without turning around. In this tone, there was the echo of a farsightedness of one who understood everything.

«Dad...» Itachi called him spontaneously, and got surprised at himself.

Since he had graduated from the Academy, he had called him “father”. For him, who had become a full-fledged shinobi, it was a distinction. Then this way of calling him had become spontaneously ordinary and he had even forgot that he had called him “dad”.

Why was he calling him in the old way now?

When he was a child...

At that time, when there weren't tied with the clan or contradictions of the village or isolation or frustration, when his family was able to feel pure feelings, maybe that had been the happiest time in his life for Itachi. And now, before the moment of parting with his family, he missed his past self.

«Mum...»

«I understand... Itachi...»

Her voice was kind, as if she had understood everything, but yet she was trying to hug him.

«...Itachi.»

Hi father called his son's name.

«...promise one last thing.»

In his upfront voice he couldn't feel the slightest resentment.

«Take care of Sasuke.»

Both his father and his mother had understood everything...

He had this intuition.

The feeling he had constantly killed since Izumi's farewell returned, flowing out.

How much Itachi was suffering, and even the fact that this decision had never been simple: his father and mother had understood everything. Moreover, they were trying to solemnly accept the destiny they had called on themselves.

His father didn't felt at all as if he was crossing swords with his son. And his mother would have protected him with her life if his father had pointed his sword towards Itachi. She was full of love she felt for Itachi, who was behind them, even towards her son that was about to kill them any time now.

Why didn't he noticed much earlier...

Why did they have to come to this...

Despite the fact that he had decided not to regret this, despite the fact that he believed to be ready for this, his father and mother's fierce figure hurt Itachi's heart bitterly.

«I understand.»

As he answered, tears overflowed from his eyes and wetted his cheeks.

His hands, which were holding the sword, trembled.

«Don't be afraid... this is the path you chose...»

He remembered his father's words when they had talked together after a long time, when he had just joined the Anbu.

«It's okay if you are true to your own opinions. You search for an answer wavering, wavering, wavering completely. Then, when you find an answer, don't be perplexed on what you've decided. Find an answer, and have the resolution of sticking to it. This is "decision".»

«Decision...»

«Right. In this world, there are few people that live while making their own decisions in their lives. All of them live while entrusting their decisions to others and turning away their eyes from their responsibility. Don't ever live in that way. Live your life making your own decisions.»

That was the path he had doubted, suffered, and decided...

He didn't have to fear.

That was his father's teaching...

«If compared with yours, our pain will be over in an instant...»

He was facing death, but even so his father was thinking about his son's life from now on. Apparently his love was trying to teach him any kind of things with his own life.

«Maybe I was too impatient...»

His father spat out some self-admonishing words.

«I should have believed in you much more. Maybe I should have trusted you, restrained the clan, and waited.»

«Dad?»

His voice trembled for his tears. Both his father and mother had probably noticed Itachi was crying. It was the first time he showed tears to others.

«Maybe you'd have become the first Uchiha Hokage. Brushing even the clan's darkness away, stopping the village's prejudices, and cutting through your destiny with your own strength...»

His father paused. The fact that he was trying to repress his feelings was clear in his trembling back.

«I stole your future from you.»

He couldn't find any words to answer. No, if he had opened his mouth now, his feelings would abandon him completely.

«But everything is too late already...»

His father inhaled from his nose.

«Even if our way of thinking is different, I'm proud of you.»

His father's pride...

He'd have liked to hear these words in a much sunnier place.

How much happier would he have been if he had been able to hear them from his father's mouth, who stared at his figure, smiling, as he stood in front of the people of the village wearing the Hokage's hat.

Even that was a dream that would never come true...

He couldn't waste time anymore.

His brother was coming back home.

Thrusting his sword in her mother's back, he pierced her immediately.

An intense pain ran through Itachi's heart.

He pulled it out, and pointed its point towards his father.

«You're really a gentle child...»

Casting his eyes down and placing his forehead on his wide back, he leaned on his father. Just like a child teasing him to carry him on his back.

Thinking about it, he had never behaved like a spoiled child in this way with this father.

He had never annoyed him on a whim, not even wept like a spoiled child.

Long, long ago...

He should have come in contact with his father.

From Itachi's eyes, who was looking downward, tears were spilling and falling ceaselessly.

The tears kept soaking mercilessly the palms that were holding the hilt.

The slight tremor that was transmitted from the sword stopped completely.

When he sensed that his father's life had come to an end, he slowly pulled out the sword.

Even at a time like this he worried about the spurt of blood. He hated himself for the karma of being a shinobi that had frozen until the marrow of his bones.

Somehow he put his ninja sword away in its scabbard with his hands, whose trembling hadn't lessened.

There was one last thing left.

Wiping his tears, Itachi waited for his time.

TRANSLATION NOTES

*Ah-uhmm okay here Yashiro says “し... 死... ししし...”, and since the pronunciation of the word “death” is *shi* I don't know if he's actually laughing or faltering, so I chose a compromise.

7

The sound of footsteps running through the hallway stopped at the other side of the door.

«Dad! Mum!» his younger brother yelled.

«Sasuke... don't come!» his father, who he had thought he was dead, yelled to the other side of the door. And this time, he stopped moving for real.

Slowly, he opened the door.

Sasuke, who saw his father and mother's fallen figures, jumped into the room.

«Dad!! Mum!!»

He showed his brother his face, which was hidden in the moonlight.

«!!»

His younger brother's face was beaded with sweat, and his eyes were strained for the panic.

«Big brother!»

When he took a step forward with trembling legs, Sasuke frantically tried to weave words together while opening both his arms wide.

«...Big brother!! Big brother!! Dad and Mum!! How! Why!! Who in the world di...»

A kunai pierced the door behind Sasuke.

«Ku...»

His younger brother's clothes tore, and a thin wound appeared in the opening of his exposed shoulder.

«Foolish little brother...»

His last task.

There was not coming back.
Mangekyō Sharingan...
«Gyaaaaaaa!!»
His father...
The splashes of blood.
His mother...
His older brother...
The Uchiha family crest torn apart.
The two of them bloodstained...
All the hate left to live...
Sasuke, who had collapsed on his hands and knees as if he was licking the floor, turned his face only towards his older brother.
«...why... big brother...?»
«To measure my ability.»
«...to measure your ability... just... just for... that... you killed everyone...?»
«It's essential.»
«What... that...»
His younger brother's body regained strength.
«Stop screwing around with me!!!»
His body, which had undergone the mangekyō Sharingan, didn't move according to his thoughts, and collapsed pitching forward in the spur of his run. In front of his eyes there was his father's face, who had lost the sparkle of life.
That moment, his younger brother stood up and rushed out of the room. Without stopping he went out of the house, and escaped in the street.
His escaped reached the end of the line.
It was a proof that he wanted to live.
A finishing touch...
He stood in front of his brother.
«You're a liar. My big brother isn't like that. But...»
«I was just playing the part of the older brother you wanted... to make sure of your "ability"...»
Live.
«You'll become an opponent to make sure of my ability. I'll keep a possibility like this to myself.»
Live.
«You thought I was detestable, you hated me. You kept wanting to surpass me. That's why you're alive.»
Live.
«...for me.»
Live.
«You're a person that will awaken the mangekyō Sharingan just like me. But there's a condition for that.»
«...»
«That is killing... your best friend.»
«...!»
«Just like me.»

«!!»

Live.

«...that... big brother... Big brother, you killed Shisui-san!?»

«Thanks to him, I obtained these “eyes”.»

Live.

«The main temple of the Naka shrine... there's the clan's secret meeting place under the seventh tatami mat to the right.»

«!?»

«There, for which reason does this Uchiha clan's ocular technique exists... its **true secrets** are written down.»

«?»

«If you awaken it, there will be **three people** who will deal with the mangekyō Sharingan, me included. In this case... kuku. It also means that I'll let you live.»

Live.

«Right now...»

«!!»

Live.

«You bastard... it's not even worth killing you.»

Live.

«...foolish little brother...»

Survive.

«If you want to kill me, resent me! Hate me! And survive in an unsightly way... Run... run... and cling to life.»

I beg you...

«And when you have the same “eyes” as me, come to face me.»

Please, live through the reality I left...

His younger brother trembled a little, and fell as if he had his strings severed.

Sasuke's eyes, who had managed to make a big step forward with his right leg, emitted a crimson light as he looked at his older brother.

He awakened it.

With that, Sasuke would find the strength to live by himself.

It was a good time.

Itachi jumped in the sky, erasing his presence.

«Wait!!»

His younger brother followed him, flying in the air.

Before he became aware of it, Sasuke tossed the three kunai he was holding in his hand.

At his agility, Itachi had his breath taken away.

He avoided two of them. But he didn't manage to avoid the third. When he took it with the forehead protector inclining his head slightly, the power of the kunai was too much and untied the knot. The kunai pierced the ground, and Itachi's forehead protector fell nearby.

While his younger brother, who was panting, approached him from behind, he slowly picked up his forehead protector. Sasuke, whose strength was already exhausted, didn't move from his spot.

Itachi had no time to care about the position of his forehead protector.

He put it roughly and tied it as it were, with Konoha's symbol turned to the right side of his head.

He wanted to leave this place quickly.

Because Itachi was crying.

His younger brother's figure, who was frantically trying to cling to life even if he was displaying his clumsy shape, kept shaking his feeling, which should have been frozen. He had just the impulse to run away with him. But that wasn't absolutely allowed.

Sasuke had to walk places hit by the sunlight as a Konoha shinobi.

Itachi's life would be together with darkness from now on.

The places in which they two would live would never meet again. No, Itachi's last moments. Only in that moment their two lives would allow a chance meeting.

A hero who would take revenge for his clan, killing his older brother, an atrocious criminal.

That was the glory destined to Sasuke. For this reason Itachi would encounter face to face with his younger brother once again.

He'd be killed by his younger brother.

That was Itachi's way of dying.

For this reason...

He couldn't show his younger brother his crying figure.

Pressing his forehead protector on his head, he put strength on his stomach.

It was a short farewell.

A moment.

Itachi's body acted before he could even think. When he noticed, his younger brother's figure disappeared from his field of vision. It wasn't until then that Itachi knew that he had looked back. His desire of burning his younger brother figure in his eyes had moved his body.

But even that wasn't allowed anymore.

Failure...

Because Itachi felt the hot tears that were running down his cheeks.

Turning his face away from his brother immediately, he jumped.

With Sasuke's collapsed presence behind him, he flew in the moonlight night without even wiping his tears.

The beautiful full moon was unbearably detestable for Itachi as if he had wanted to tear it to pieces.

*

The Anbu had been called together in the district for taking custody of the corpses when not even one hour had passed since Itachi had left.

Danzō walked through the street where the corpses were scattered.

He had just left Hiruzen. Hiruzen, who had come to know about Itachi's murder, had got mad, and had turned his rage against Danzō. Then he had arranged his dismissal as an advisor and the dissolution of the Root, and had sent him away.

It didn't mean that he was going to cling to the position of advisor, now that his dearest wish of the annihilation of the Uchiha had come true, and even if he had officially dissolved the Root he could secretly manoeuvring everything without letting Hiruzen know, as long as he did it secretly.

In the end, Danzō would obtain the things he wanted to obtain.

«Danzō-sama!»

One of his underlings appeared.

A man wearing a fox mask drawn with a red colour.

«What is it, Gozu?»

Danzō called his underling by his name.

«...»

Gozu stayed silent.

The moment he saw the two holes that had been opened in the mask concealed under the hood, Danzō gasped.

Crimson eyes with a pattern in which three commas had mixed together in the middle...

«You!»

«I'll be always watching you.» Itachi, who had turned into Gozu, said.

«If you lay your hands on Sasuke, I'll leak all the secret information of the village to the enemy countries.»

«You know what kind of consequence that would cause for the village, Itachi.»

«I'm already one who escaped from the village.»

«I thought you were a capable piece under my control, but... apparently I misjudged you.»

«If you lay your hands on Sasuke, you're a dead man. Engrave it on your mind.»

Itachi, who had took Gozu's shape, vanished turning into countless crows.

«Don't take your eyes away from that guy.» Danzō muttered to no one in particular, and he heard the sound of a bug's wings in his ear.

*

«You hid here without being noticed by anybody... As I thought, you're really an excellent shinobi.»

The Third Hokage, Sarutobi Hiruzen, smiled while raising his body from the mattress.

«In this place's case, there's nothing that can be heard by anybody. You moved here because you knew that, right?»

«Yes.» Itachi answered, still kneeled before the mattress.

«They have already added your name in the bingo book as a S-rank criminal. Surely penetrating into the village, and sneaking into my bedroom, hadn't been easy. Won't you tell me why do you want to talk with me so much?»

«It's about Sasuke.»

«Don't worry, that child is innocent. We'll take care of him as a child of the village from now on.»

The Hokage's strong words brought relief to Itachi's heart.

«Thank you very much. But...»

«It's about Danzō, huh?»

«Yes.»

Itachi admired the Third's perspicacity, which surpassed even the Sharingan. On the other hand, he was disgusted by it.

If he had the ability to read people's heart so cleverly, why didn't he walk the path of cooperation with the Uchiha clan? He felt like asking so, but even if he thought about it, it was an inevitable thing.

It didn't change the fact that Itachi was an S-rank criminal.

The clan had completely perished, except for the two brothers Sasuke and Itachi.

That was the reality.

«Don't worry about Danzō. I've officially fired him as an advisor, and at the same time I also ordered the dissolution of the Root.»

«Will that man follow your order straight away, I wonder.»

«He already retired as an advisor. Also the Root has already dissolved. However, I can't deny that there's the possibility that he'll maintain secretly it somehow. I've ordered the people who guarded the Uchiha clan to guard him instead.»

There was no need to guard the Uchiha clan anymore.

The Third's words hollowed Itachi's chest.

«Don't worry, Itachi. He won't lay a finger on Sasuke.»

«Please, take care of him.»

Itachi bowed his head deeply.

«Well then...»

He turned his back on the Hokage, standing up.

«What will you do from now on?»

Itachi answered, still looking at the door.

«There's an organization that bothers me.»

«Will you join it?»

«Yes. I'll keep watch of it from the inside, and if it goes on a rampage, it'll have to stop at all costs.»

«Even if you deserted the village, you're still the shinobi who loves peace more than anyone else.»

«...»

Itachi thought that he was still a Konoha shinobi. The village in which Sasuke lived was his birthplace. He thought that he had been abandoned, but he'd never be abandoned.

«The name of this organization?»

«“Akatsuki”...»

*

«How about showing yourself?» Itachi muttered to no one, inside the deserted wood. He had hardly finished saying it, when a small flame appeared in the empty space. It burned intensely for a moment, and it immediately disappeared. Only a slight smoke, which dispersed, was left. Among the smoke, which was revolving in the air, there was the fragment of a transparent wing.

«It's you, right? The member of the Aburame clan.»

«*I've been called “Sugaru” in front of you.*»

A large number of bugs gathered in the wood, in which there had been nothing so far, and formed a huge shadow in the empty space. The buzzing sounds of their wings overlapped, and fell on Itachi, turning into words.

«Does my surveillance cease, and are you going back to your owner?»

«*You know as well that such thing is not allowed, right?*»

«Is that so...»

The bugs gradually took a human form.

A man wearing a White Tiger mask appeared in the empty space, and was flying in midair together with the sound of countless wings.

«I have no intention of being under Danzō's control forever.»

«Things like your wishes are inconsequential for that man. What will you do, and who will you be, those are the most important things for that man.»

«Does it mean they're parallel lines?»

«A thing like that.»

«In this case...»

Itachi looked up towards Sugaru.

«There's only one solution.»

His Sharingan glittered.

«I don't understand.»

«You.»

He gathered chakra in his left and right eye, and activated even the mangekyō Sharingan.

He sensed the innumerable eyes that were in Sugaru's body.

He felt a dull pain inside his right eye.

It was because he had kept overusing it since that night.

«You said you've always been watching me. But you're just one. You eat and you sleep.

So that time, who was watching me?»

«Even if you use such a roundabout way of speaking... Ah...»

«Apparently, you noticed.»

Sugaru's appearance, who was fluttering in midair, was strange. While his body trembled all over, apparently he was frantically fighting against something.

«Haven't you thought that I'd notice the presence of the bugs that were guarding me?»

«Don't tell me... your mangekyō Sharingan against my "cursed bugs" ...»

«By sharing your chakra, you absorb what the bugs see with your experiences. It's even more efficient than using a Shadow Clone.»

The sound of the wings from Sugaru's body disappeared. At the same time, his body, which had suddenly gained gravity, was attracted by the earth. Sugaru, whose body was not free anymore, fell on the ground headfirst without even being able to land.

«Ku... kukuku...»

Sugaru's damaged vocal cords let out a crude moan. Itachi declared this coldly, as he looked down on him.

«You're Shisui's enemy.»

«Wa-wait...»

«Amaterasu.»

As his whispering voice poured on Sugaru, one jet-black flame burned on the top of his shoulder. This strange-looking flame had already wrapped his whole body, spreading in the blink of an eye. His bugs escaped from every hole, abandoning their host. However, the jet-black flames coiled around every one of them.

«Those flames won't disappear until they've burned the things I stared at. Not even one bug that nested inside you will escape.»

The screams of his death agony echoed through the wood. The bugs, clad in the dark flames, flew around him with a buzzing sound. They looked completely like a swarm of jet-black fireflies that had come out in the daytime.

*

«Even now I can't believe it.» his former kōhai muttered while staring at the teacup she was holding, and Shinko sighed while giving her a look of sympathy.

«To think that Itachi-senpai would do a thing like that.» Himuka, his former kōhai, said shedding tears. On the light green surface inside the teacup, there were small ripples.

«Even I still can't believe it, but the reality is the reality...»

«But senpai»

«I'm not your senpai anymore, right? That's enough, stop calling me in that way.»

«But...»

«Look, why don't you cheer up eating some dango.»

She held out to Himuka some dango full of anko that had been placed on a high stool.

«Thank you very much.» she said, she grabbed the skewer and stuffed one of it in her cheeks opening her puckered mouth with all her might.

«They're delicious.» his former kōhai said, smiling, and Shinko smiled back, turned her body towards the road and looked up towards the sky. A bird was flying in the deep blue, sunny sky. It was a strange bird, similar to a hawk or an eagle, which was flying drawing circles.

«A thing like that... For me, for some reason it's not clear...»

«What is it?» Himuka asked, stuffing another dango in her mouth.

Shinko answered her, still looking at the sky.

«Even though that kid was eight years younger, he has always acted more adult than me.»

«I understand. Even I am older than him, but I spontaneously called him "Itachi-senpai"...»

«I think that after you entirely took some various troubles upon yourself, it can't be helped... But that kid, they say that he killed even that cute girl that came here once... He wasn't the kind of kid that would do something like that. I mean, Itachi.»

When she said it, she was moved to tears as well. While she thought so, Shinko frantically endured that hot thing that was boiling inside her chest.

«That's right... I thought she was his girlfriend...» Himuka muttered, looking down.

Shinko turned around with force, shaking off her tears.

«What, were you aiming at Itachi?»

«N-no, a thing like that...»

«I'm kidding.»

His former kōhai burst into laughter.

Shinko muttered, so that she didn't hear her.

«It's okay, I understand...»

When she nonchalantly wiped her tears, which she had shed again, she heard the owner's voice that called her from inside the shop.

She would continue as usual, no matter what.

*

«Are you done with the things you had to care of?»

At the man's words, who was sitting on a huge stump, Itachi nodded silently.

He was in mountain at the border with another country. The trees around him had been all chopped down, and were exposing their clumsy figures. On the dreary surface of the mountain, strong squalls were blowing incessantly. While protecting himself from the wind that was blowing him away, Itachi stood opposite to the masked man.

«Well, what will you do from now on?»

The whirlpool-looking mask that covered the man's face was turned towards Itachi. The hole opened near his right eye was staring at him fixedly.

Uchiha Madara.

That was that man's name.

«I'm an S-rank criminal. I'll be targeted no matter where I go.»

«Haven't you thought about the chat we've had before? I think it's a convenient conversation to protect yourself, now that you're a wanted man.»

«That's right...»

«Let's meet an interesting man.» Madara said, and turned his face towards an empty space.

«Right. Call him.»

Apparently he was talking with somebody through chakra.

«Long time no see. There's a guy who wants to meet you for a while. Right. Yeah, I'm sending chakra here through Pain. You connect your chakra with Pain.»

Madara looked at Itachi again.

«He came.»

In the empty place immediately near the stump on which Madara was sitting, a rainbow-coloured wave arose. It trembled violently for a little while, but it gradually it turned into a human shape, and finally the silhouette of a man appeared.

Itachi had seen that man many times.

«Oh, long time no see, Itachi-kun.»

The rainbow-coloured illusion emitted an ominous voice that sent shivers down his spine.

«You are...» Itachi muttered, and Madara told him: «The legendary sannin... Orochimaru.»

«It's not unusual for you to use such an unnecessary irony.»

The rainbow-coloured illusion lifted the corner of his mouth slightly.

«Maybe I'm a little bit intoxicated for this situation.»

«Fufufu... So unlike you.»

«That's right.»

While he listened to the two men talking in a new way of speaking that showed that they were old friends, Itachi was thinking about different things.

Orochimaru had repeatedly performed forbidden human experimentations, and was a serious criminal that had been pursued by the Third Hokage in the village. Moreover, during the previous Great War had been feared by a lot of shinobi, and had obtained the name of "legendary sannin" together with Jiraiya and Tsunade.

Uchiha Madara was a legendary shinobi of the foundation of Konohagakure.

Those two together were so powerful that there was no one in the shinobi world that didn't know them. So what in the world was an organization like "Akatsuki" planning, since it was secretly manoeuvred by those two's joined forces?

He couldn't let them pass by.

«When I was in the village, I met you many times, but... it's the first time in nine years, right, Itachi-kun.»

It's not that he was particularly acquainted with him. When Orochimaru was still in the village they had a relationship in which they exchanged greetings. They weren't intimate to the point of talking together over-familiarly.

«You left the village eight years ago.»

«Oh, is that so I wonder? Since then, I've reincarnated once. Using a forbidden jutsu.»

Orochimaru was famous for his human experimentations when he was in the village. It wasn't strange that he could reincarnate.

«This jutsu, in exchange of granting an eternal time to the user, weakens his perception of time. Have you ever felt like you can't tell the menu of the meals you had the day before yesterday and the one you had the day before apart? For me, a period of ten years is no different from ten days ago.»

«...»

«Fufu... A thing like this is inconsequential. Because there's a much more different reason for which this man made us meet, right?»

The lips of the illusion split at left and right, becoming the mouth of a snake.

«It's nice to know you'll join "Akatsuki".»

«Are there other shinobi who were in the Village of the Hidden Leaf?»

«This man and I, and you if you join, will be the only three.»

«Really...»

Judging from Orochimaru's words, inside "Akatsuki" there were also shinobi who escaped from other villages.

The darkness in a place that transcended the village was starting to crawl...

«That village, which couldn't maintain the peace unless they excluded our clan... The existence of the shinobi, who can't show their own existence unless they make other people surrender... There's nothing wrong in waiting and seeing from inside what kind of plan will be taken against your organization.»

«A typical answer of yours.»

Ignoring Orochimaru, who had burst into a mysterious laughter, Madara stood up.

«Welcome into "Akatsuki".»

Itachi shook his extended right hand.

His palm was awfully cold. His hand showed no sign of blood to the point that he had the illusion that the leather glove that wrapped Madara's palm was frozen.

«Well then, I'm going. Let's meet again, Itachi-kun.»

Orochimaru's illusion disappeared into thin air.

«Well then, shall we go?»

«Where?»

«To our headquarter of course, the Village of the Hidden Rain.»

Madara's eyes, which were peeking from behind the mask, shone crimson.

Suddenly, Danzō's words were brought back to Itachi's mind.

"During your life, war will always follow you around."

Now, Itachi was about to set his foot on the maelstrom of people that were trying to give birth to a war.

That night, Itachi had lost that light called "hope" together with his clan.

To become an excellent shinobi, better than anybody else, to reach the position of Hokage, to lead the world to subjugation using his position as much as he wanted, and...

To erase all the conflicts of this world.

That was the path of the hope that Itachi had pictured.

Everything was lost.

But...

Even if hope was lost, he still had his dream.

Even if he didn't walk the path of light, he could pursue his dream of erasing all the conflicts.

It didn't matter if he had an evil countenance. If Itachi's destiny always called wars, he'd make use of it as much as he could.

He'd attract all the conflicts and calamities of this world, and the hateful heart of people. He believed he could make his dream come true by putting himself in the vortex of conflicts.

After fighting, fighting, fighting to the bitter end...

His younger brother would wait for him.

After he'd have received and suppressed all the wars, there would be a peaceful world. In the centre of that, there would be Sasuke's figure, the hero who defeated his older brother, the incarnation of sins.

Darkness would be the accomplice of his dream...

Itachi ran, following behind Madara, who had gone on ahead.

A bird was flying above his head, following him.

A perpetual darkness was spreading in front of him.

And yet, there was a noble, divine smile in Itachi's lips.

His brother was at the end of that path.

«Wait for me, Sasuke...»

The journey of Itachi's death began from here.

Was the world really saved after Ōtsutsuki Kaguya was sealed?

No.

If I released the Infinite Tsukuyomi, and their old lives returned again, people would repeat the same mistakes over and over again.

A great evil isn't really terrible.

Small evils nest in people's hearts...

My older brother knew this.

And taking everyone's evils upon himself, he had died as a criminal while he desired peace more than everyone else.

He was a real Hokage.

In this case, what should I do?

A person who could acknowledge the frail human heart, and react to evil feelings, and yet could keep on living, was nothing but a real warrior.

He could do it for me...

In this case, I'll do it.

I'll walk the path that my brother showed me risking his life, too.

«Revolution.»